

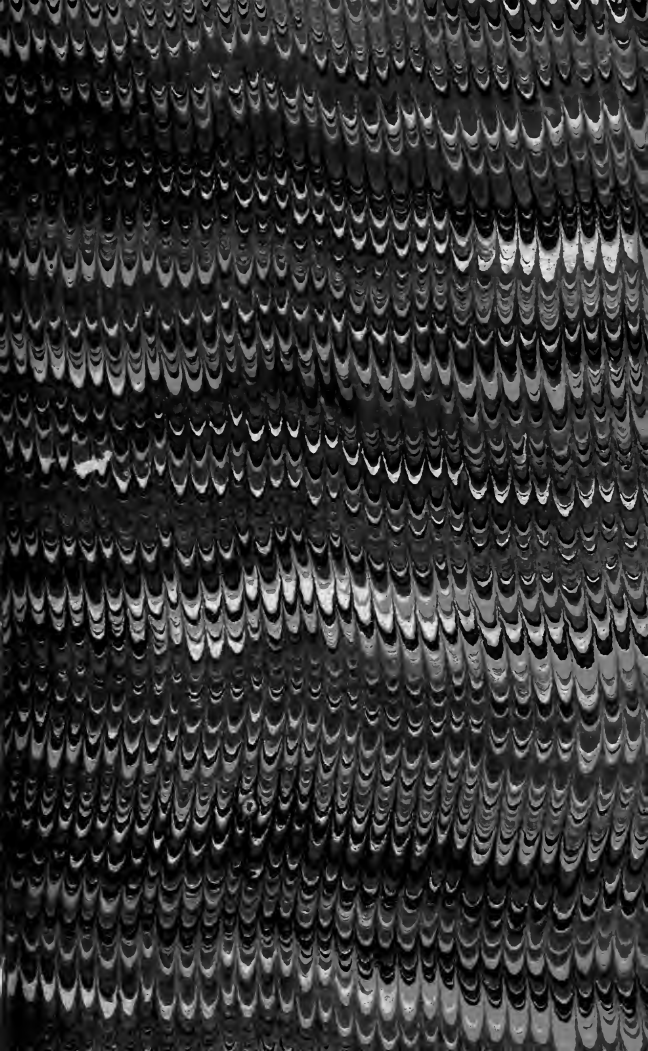


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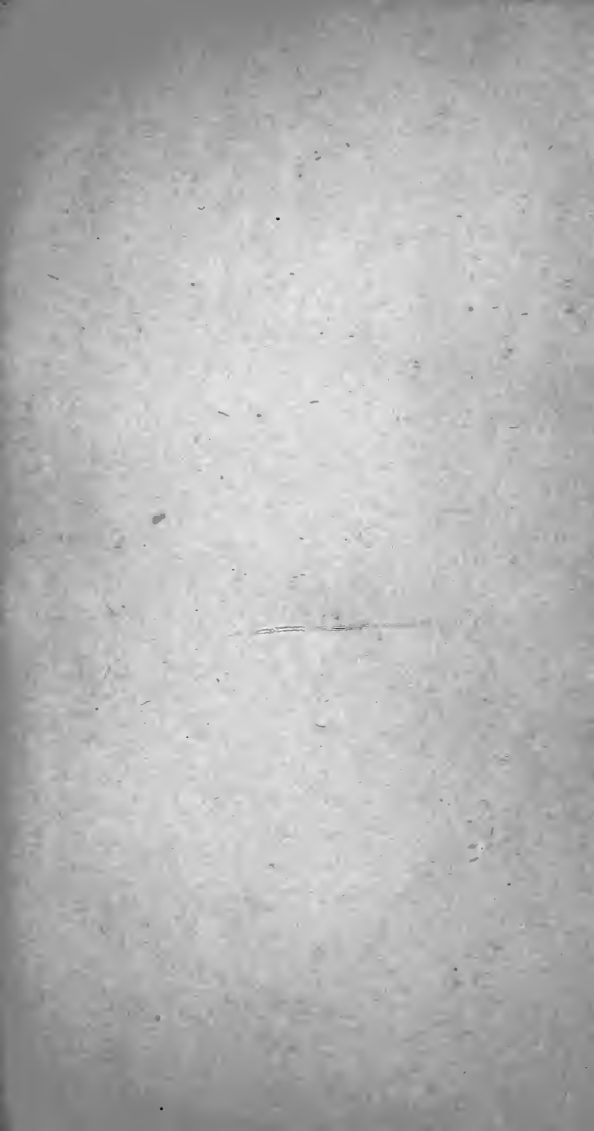
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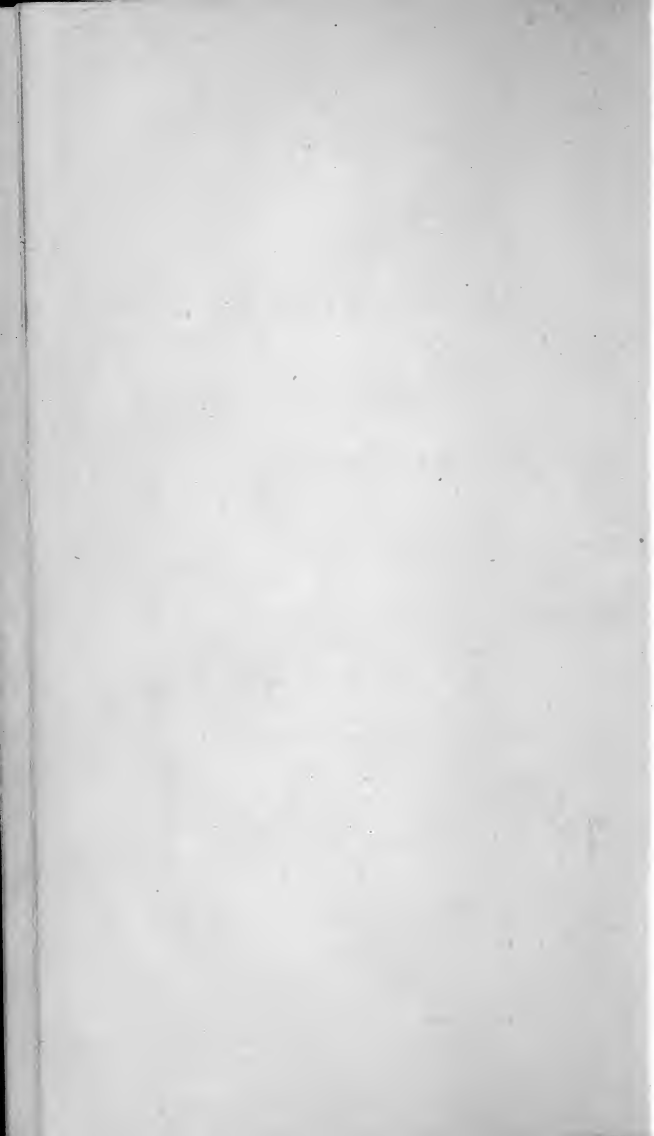
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.











LETTERS

FROM

BARON HALLER

TO

HIS DAUGHTER,

ON THE

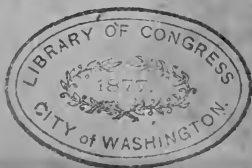
TRUTHS OF THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION.

TRANSLATED FROM THE GERMAN.

ALBANY,

PRINTED BY H. C. SOUTHWICK,

1816.



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1816

TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE.

THEY who have studied nature most, and penetrated deepest into her secret recesses, have discovered themselves, and demonstrated to others, that human science is bounded by a narrow horizon, and that our knowledge is imperfect within the circle.—Beyond the sphere of moral vision lie many truths which we can neither discover nor comprehend. A conviction of the weakness of human understanding prepares the philosophic mind for the admission of truths, which exceed its capacity, upon moral evidence. A little philosophy leads to atheism : a great deal brings back the mind to religion. *Paschal, Bacon, Boyle, Berkeley, Maclaurin, Boerhave, Newton, Clark*, in proportion as they explored with success the mysteries of creation, felt their breasts warmed with devotion to its great Governor and Author. The name of HALLER, which is already so illustrious in the world of letters, will one day be venerable and dear to the friends of religion and virtue, the number of whom his writings will contribute to increase. This great and good man, in the

earlier part of his life, had his doubts concerning the objects of the Christian Faith : but these doubts were dispelled by a successful application to every branch of science, on the one hand ; and by a candid examination of the sacred oracles, on the other. *The first*, by purging his soul, according to his own emphatic phrase, of arrogance and pride, filled it with that *poverty of spirit*, which, of all the Christian graces, as we are instructed by Divine Wisdom, first enters the kingdom of heaven. *The second* convinced him, that the *divine revelation*, conveyed in the Holy Scriptures, was a boon worthy of the merciful Author of our nature to give, and such as was fit for guilty mortals to receive with humble gratitude and reverence.

There are hours of despondency and languor in every human life, which can neither be prevented nor remedied by the most prosperous worldly circumstances, or by the greatest skill of man. The healing art, which Mr. HALLER applied with unequalled success to the disease of the body, could not, as he experienced in his own person, reach that dissatisfaction with the present, and that apprehension and dread of a future state, which at certain seasons in some, and in certain stages of life in all, disturb the

breasts of mankind. In the multitude of his thoughts within him, thy comforts, O Lord! delighted his soul. Thy laws were to him a delightful subject of attention, and a joyful object of hope. He tasted of the fountain of life, whose refreshing streams so fortified his soul that he beheld undismayed the king of terrors !

The consolation which he felt himself, he was anxious to impart to others. Like the Saviour of the world, he went about doing good to the souls and bodies of men. He eagerly seized the numberless opportunities, which his profession of a physician gave him, of convincing those with whom he conversed of the truth, and of converting them to the practice of the Christian religion. And this he did, not only by his instructions, but by his example. For he was charitable to the poor; he sympathized in the tenderest manner with the distressed; and was humane and just in all his dealings with the sons of men.

A thousand incidents, which passed unheeded by the vulgar eye, recalled to his mind the *Deity*: and when he recollected or heard that *great name*, he gave vent, in whatever company or circumstances he happened to be placed, to some pious ejaculation; with his eyes and hands lifted to *Heaven*.

While his humane and feeling mind embraced in his bonds of love all his fellow-men, and interested him in their present and future concerns, there was one person whom God and nature had recommended to his peculiar tenderness and care. He had a daughter, dear to him as his own soul. He knew the inquietudes to which the common lot of humanity would subject her throughout life, and the fears that would alarm her tender breast at the approach of death, of which, it was some consolation to him, that "*he would not live to be the mournful witness.*" To her he addressed, at different times, but in regular succession, these Letters, which were afterwards, by his permission, published for the benefit of the world at large. They have met on the continent, and it is to be hoped they will meet in this island,* with a favorable reception. For,

1st, The author has exhibited, in an incredible small compass, the completest defence of Christianity, in our judgment, that has ever been offered to the world. Other writers have urged particular arguments in favour of this cause—with great ability and ingenuity. Mr. HALLER collects the best arguments of the ablest divines in every period of Christianity; ar

* Great-Britain.

ranges them in a judicious order ; and brings their united force into one centre of percussion. The separate rays which flow from the genius and pious industry of Christians in different ages and nations, he attracts to one *focus*, and thereby illuminates the objects he means to illustrate, by an effulgence of light which is sufficient to penetrate and dispel the thickest clouds of ignorance, error, and prejudice.

2dly, It is not only his object to shew that Jesus of Nazareth was a person divinely commissioned from Heaven for the reformation of the world : but that he was in reality *the Son of God*, and that he poured out his soul a propitiation for the sins of men. We have defenders of Christianity, Socinians and Arians, who frame systems of religion to themselves, and then prove this religion by texts of scripture. Finding that they cannot raise their conceptions to the sublimity of all Divine truth, they think they do good service to the cause of Christianity by lowering Divine truths to human conception. Thus they admit certain parts, and reject others, of a system that must be wholly rejected or wholly admitted. Mr. HALLER receives with pious awe even what he cannot comprehend, and with humble confidence walks forward into those regions

where, according to the figure of the poet—"Lame Faith leads Understanding blind."—Yet even there, in those sacred walks where the grandeur and incomprehensibility of the surrounding objects lay prostrate the powers of the human mind, he finds room for the exercise of reason in the service of the Christian cause. He shews the credibility of mysteries which exceed our comprehension, by manifold analogies taken from the process of nature in the inanimate, animal and rational world. He analyzes, in some degree, the economy of Divine grace, vindicates even the hardest doctrines of Christianity, if we may be allowed this expression, and throughout all its parts, justifies the ways of God to man.

3dly, There is something in these letters of Mr. HALLER which not only convinces the judgment, but which operates upon the heart, and inclines the will. His feeling representations of the misery of human life, and the fitness of the Christian religion to remedy that misery, interest the affections in the cause of truth, and dispose the reader to give it a fair hearing. Abstracted demonstrations of the being and attributes of God; formal and syllogistical proofs of the resurrection of Christ, have but a feeble

influence on the understanding, because they have none on the passions. It is the will that directs the power of attention, and without attention there is no room for the exercise of judgment. Where there is a prepossession against any doctrine, the mind, swift as lightning, fixes its whole force on the arguments that tend to invalidate its truth: and, as the resources of a fertile imagination and subtile genius are infinite, the sceptic easily retreats into the labyrinths of metaphysics. It is an easy matter to be convinced of what we wish to be true; and, in matters that admit of reasoning, it is, on the contrary, difficult to persuade mankind of the truth of what they wish were false. It is the peculiar excellency of this little performance, that while it shews the truth of Christianity by arguments, it disposes the will to give those arguments a candid, a favorable attention—we become acquainted with the Divine Person, whose mission from heaven it is the author's object to prove; and we are ready to cry out, of ourselves, "*truly this man was the Son of God!*"

4thly, The variety and extent of Mr. HALLER's learning, must strike both Believers and infidels. The former will rejoice in the acquisition of so able an advo-

cate for so good a cause : the latter will be somewhat startled, when they find so universal a genius a Believer in Jesus Christ ; for *he* must be self-conceited indeed, who refuses even to examine a religion of which HALLER was a disciple ; a man so deeply versed in *oriental, classical, and modern languages*, and in science of every kind *metaphysical, mathematical, physiological, moral, and theological*.—The various knowledge of the author appears even in this little volume of familiar epistles to his daughter. Nor will any person who reads them imagine that he made a display of knowledge through vanity or ostentation. No : this devout man was too deeply impressed with sentiments of God, to think of himself ; much less would he have given way to any effusions of vanity. But, as rivers take their tincture from the soil through which they pass, so the genius and turn of thinking of a man of letters, is apt to display itself in his conversation, or in his writings, on any subject.

5thly, The paternal tenderness that breathes throughout these letters interests the reader both in their author and in the person to whom they are addressed ; and gains his favorable attention to the whole performance.—Many parents will adopt

the sentiments of Mr. HALLER, and present this little book to their children as the dearest pledge of parental affection. For what parent but would wish, in the last stage of life, to address from his heart these words to his child ? “ The king of terrors
“ approaches me with hasty steps, but I
“ behold his advances without dismay. Beyond that era of my existence I see objects of joy and hope, which invite me to
“ leave this world, and to step forward into
“ eternity ; into mansions of holiness and
“ bliss, where death shall be banished for
“ ever, and where sin shall have no place.
“ After having finished your course, you
“ will again meet your father in those glorious and peaceful abodes, where the idea
“ of our frail mortality shall no longer disturb our breasts, or fill them with shame ;
“ and where the miseries of this life shall no
“ longer draw tears from our eyes.”

LETTERS, &c.



LETTER I.

Comfort of Religion in the hour of death, and on the entrance into another state of existence. Necessity of establishing faith on a firm foundation. Character of modern Sceptics. Catalogue of eminent defenders of the Christian Faith. The Author's apology for engaging in the same cause. Arguments in favor of Religion come with peculiar weight from a layman. Defects and errors in the writings as well of divines as philosophers.

It affords me, my dear child, great satisfaction, to observe the serious turn of your mind, though you are now at an age, when the world appears in its gayest and most alluring colours. But this life, however diversified with pleasing charms, must have an end, though at present it may seem at a remote distance. I, perhaps, shall not live to be the sorrowful witness of such an event; but that day, which is to terminate your existence, approaches insensibly; and when the awful moment arrives, what then will be your support? The caresses of your fond

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children, the conversation of your beloved friends, will be but a feeble refuge. Do you think that it will be in the power of medicine to stop the fleeting breath, or retard the fatal hour? The earth will seem to bend beneath your tottering feet, and you will enter into an eternity, immense and unfathomable; where will be found other joys and other griefs than you shall have experienced in this life. Evils will present themselves, in this new state, with a more terrible aspect; and joys, infinitely superior to all that the world afforded. At this last period of life, when your eyes will no longer behold the light—when your ears will no more hear the well known voice of those who were dearest to you—when you will feel the arrows of death pierce your trembling heart, who will support you in this scene of fear and dread, if God withdraws his succour?

It is a just and trite observation, that to arm ourselves, by a voluntary inattention, against the day of evil—against that day which must decide our lot for ever, is a mark of the highest folly and extravagance. Miserable expedient! which cannot delay a single moment, nor improve, in the least, the destiny which awaits us. The enemies of Revelation have sometimes made a con-

session well worthy our attention. They acknowledge, that a Christian, whose faith, notwithstanding, in their opinion, is chimerical, ceases not to be happy, even at the time when his body is almost deprived of its vivifying powers, and is hastening to a state of corruption—at that moment, in which the soul seems deprived of every support. They confess that his hopes, however ill-founded they esteem them, and deserving the contempt of philosophy, never forsake him, but embolden and encourage him to the last. His faith, say they, inspires him with resolution.—Armed with this, he dares to look Death in the face ; because, after this period of existence is finished, he extends his view to an eternity of happiness.

But faith, unless firmly established, cannot produce this effect ; neither can it be called faith, if it is not supported on some real foundation. If we believe more through the influence of custom and example, than from the arguments of reason, or the internal conviction of our own minds, this kind of persuasion is false and groundless, nor is capable of giving confidence or peace.—Death is an object frightful to human nature : the sufferings which precede it, the constant and regular lapse of time which unavoidably draws us nearer to our dissolu-

tion, must excite in us painful and disagreeable sentiments; and such as it is not in our power to suppress; and when our faith is wavering, we are less able to make a stand against them. But if we would entertain more pleasing thoughts, they must arise from the consideration of a future state of felicity; the certain hope of which has the same effect upon the mind, as those impressions which we receive from sensible objects.

To a conviction founded upon an attentive examination of the grounds of our faith, we must join a perfect persuasion, that this eternal happiness will not be indiscriminately conferred, but must be the reward of some preceding merit. Without this sentiment, we cannot experience any of those consolations, which we particularly stand in need of at that time, when there is nothing upon earth from whence we can derive any solid satisfaction. We must judge for ourselves—must see, as it were with our own eyes, the proofs of religion: we must feel the force of them. Both the understanding and the heart must give their assent, if we are desirous of their having any influence upon our passions. Apply yourself, therefore, with all confidence, to those researches. The rock of salvation is solid-

ity itself; it cannot be shaken, either by the doubts of the sceptic, or the sarcasm of the sneerer.

Your father, who now addresses you, during the period of a long life, spent in continual labour and study, thought himself obliged to consecrate some of his leisure hours to inquiries of this nature. The result of which was, that those truths which have been called in question, always appeared to him the more evident and respectable, the more attentively he examined the reasons and proofs on which they were founded.

But who are those sceptics and those sneerers, which, in this our day, so much abound? The one have never studied the principles of the Christian faith; frivolity and precipitation mark their character; with them ridicule supplies the place of reason, and they are busily employed in an unprofitable pursuit. They ought rather to regret the loss of that time, which should have been devoted to a serious inquiry after truth. The others, the free-thinkers of the age, who are at the head of a party, and the heroes of it, have never been at the pains to acquire a knowledge of the ancient languages, and of history—a knowledge, nevertheless, very essential in assisting them to form a right

judgment of the fundamental doctrines of faith. I have read the works of their most famous authors. Not one of them was capable of understanding the true and precise acceptation of the terms made use of in the sacred writings—Not one of them had entered deep enough into the study of Nature, to trace Divinity in the various objects which surround us, notwithstanding those displays are so numerous, so eminent and illustrious, in every work of creation, whether we consider its design or disposition. Therefore, that which furnished Hobbes with a subject of infidelity, confirmed Newton in his faith—that which was to Ofray a matter of sport, was to Boerhaave an extensive theme for wonder and adoration.

I know that a young mother, residing in a gay city, cannot so abstract herself from company, as either to study the oriental languages, or to make a proficiency in chronological researches. Yet without these aids, she may find sufficient means to confirm her mind in the truth of the Christian faith. In languages which are more known, we have a number of apologies written in favor of religion; which appear to me fully sufficient to remove all those doubts and difficulties which are thrown in our way by sceptics. The pious Madame de Sevigne, a woman

of high rank, and one who possessed a fine and elegant taste, was not insensible to what religion had taught concerning eternity.—She well understood the merit of the illustrious Abbadie,* and rendered him ample justice. Ditton has demonstrated, with most convincing energy, the truth of the resurrection of Christ. Sherlock hath examined this fact with all the accuracy and precision which are employed in our courts of justice.† Another writer, who is yet living, renowned for eloquence and a talent for poetry; not more illustrious by birth, than distinguished by eminent abilities, Lord Lytton, I mean, an English nobleman, hath ably proved, by examining the conversion of St. Paul, that nothing else but the actual appearance of one from heaven, was able to produce conviction in so bitter an enemy to Christ and his gospel. It is perhaps rather disserviceable to the cause of religion, that

* A celebrated Protestant divine, born at Noy, in the province of Bearn, in 1654. After having finished his studies, he was made minister of the French church at Berlin, from whence he came to London in 1690, where he was for some time minister of the French church in the Savoy, and was afterwards promoted to the deanery of Killaloe in Ireland. He published several works in French, that were much esteemed, particularly, "A Treatise on the Truth of the Christian Religion."

† In a Piece intituled—"The Trial of the Witnesses of the Resurrection."

Tach hath been compelled to abandon a work, which he had begun with a design of invalidating its tenets. For the least appearance of persecution only serves to make converts, even in a bad cause. You well know with what minuteness and philosophic precision our friend M. Bonnet hath proved the divine mission of our Saviour. A woman might perfectly understand all these books ; and there would be nothing wanting to her conviction, if she could be sure that none of the facts were suppositious, none of the arguments sophistical, which the authors have made use of. The patrons of infidelity, who would be delighted to discover any defects in these arguments, would undoubtedly have brought them to light, if there had been any to be found ; and instead of these objections so often refuted, the repetition of which has been disgusting to every reader of sense, they would not have omitted to usher them into the world with an air of triumph, and thereby have exposed the defenders of religion.

I thought, however, though perhaps too hastily, that my observations on these important truths might not be altogether unprofitable. What the churchmen have written on religious matters, has, in general, gained but inferior credit. Their arguments

have lost much of their weight, from the consideration of their having been urged by persons who were bound, both by honor and interest, to defend the profession in which they were engaged. In other writings, published in favor of religion, some discover and condemn a certain characteristic peculiarity of genius or turn of thinking. They also find fault with those ingenious conjectures, which authors, fond of displaying ingenuity, sometimes very improperly intersperse in their works, even on subjects of religion. Other authors on the same subjects, have been censured for their prolixity, which, however, is not without its use. It is oftentimes necessary to check the juvenile impatience of some men, whose attachment to pleasure is such, that they cannot spare from their amusements that time which is necessary even to read a few pages with attention.

Some persons have been of opinion, that if a layman, who, in the course of a long life, hath had occasion to testify his love for the truth, and hath sacrificed to it great temporary advantages, was to write in defence of the faith, and to found his arguments on such facts only as were incontestible, his suffrage would carry with it much greater weight and authority. Some friends

of mine, from the too good opinion they have been pleased to entertain of me, have suggested, that it was in my power to accomplish the task agreeably to their ideas; and that under my hands, the work would be useful not only to you, but to other young persons who have, at the same time, an inclination to studious inquiries. They were persuaded, that the less erudition there should be in the work, the less there would be of novelty, but the more of truth, whose sacred rights might be much better defended, than by using the common-place arguments generally adopted by this class of writers; many of which are too vague to be allowed. In short, it is for your sake alone that I now address you on this subject, not to procure the approbation of the learned. The last words of a father, far advanced in years, and who sees his end approaching, will doubtless make a greater impression on your heart, than all the lessons of a skilful teacher. You cannot but confess, that in my present situation, at a time of life when the world offers nothing which can excite the passions, it must be conviction only, and a perfect persuasion of the truth, that hath induced me to this undertaking. But there is yet another reason which determined me to form the present design. It ap-

pears to me, that the Theologians, and even many pious Christians, have considered God in no other view than in the relation in which he stands with man; their ideas, therefore, of this adorable Being, are very narrow and confined. On the other hand, the Philosophers have not regarded him in the character of Father, Judge, and Benefactor; but only of the Creator of all things, and Governor of the world; but sometimes their idea hath been more limited, and they have described him simply as the Governor of empires.

The first represent God too much like man, and neglect, or regard with too great indifference, the interesting relations that man stands in with God, as being his creature, as being a sinner, and as having the blessing of grace. They seem to have forgotten, or to have overlooked, that love which we all owe to the supreme Being; nor to have recommended that humble reverence, and profound respect, which is due to the Omnipotent Creator of all things. This God, who is the Saviour of men, the Lord of all created worlds, is entitled to the profoundest respect and adoration from all his creatures.

LETTER II.

A description of that anxiety and terror which hang over every mind in life, and death, and above all on its entrance into the world of spirits. Holiness of the Divine Nature. Vice the natural object of punishment. Necessity of punishing sin, in order to maintain the order of the universe. Many intermediate orders of intelligent beings between the Deity and man. Pride and arrogance of human nature. Delay of the punishment of sin not an argument against its certainty. Corruption, selfishness, and consequently injustice, of human nature asserted, in contradiction to certain philosophers ; and described, from its earliest appearance in infancy, to its full height and maturity. Vanity of worldly pursuits, and importance of preparation for eternity. Love of the world and the things of the world, the grand source of envy, malice, and contention. The mind purified and tranquilized by the prospect and hope of futurity. Remaining power of corruption in the best and most pious minds. Necessity of an atonement for sin acknowledged by Socrates.

I have seen a book, written for the instruction of children, which begun with this important question—*What is thy consolation in life and in death?*—It is not the world which can give it you, or insure, even for a moment, any of those talents or advantages which you possess—such as youth, health, fortune, conjugal affection, children of promising hopes, and, in short, whatever contributes to render life agreeable. An unexpected malady—you yourself have experienced it—may secretly canker the bloom of youth, and deprive it of all its charms

and enjoyments. The sword of death is suspended over your head by a tender thread ; neither can the world defend you from those strokes of adversity, which are the inevitable lot of mortals. Or, supposing that the years pass away without the visitations of sickness, yet, in their revolving course, your natural vigour is diminished ; as in cases of rebellion, where the strength of the nation is weakened by a division of its forces.—Your soul, which is of an immortal nature, will sometimes obtrude on you a reflection, that the body, upon which you have built great expectations, is daily tumbling into ruins. You scarcely perceive the secret course of a river, which accompanies you in your passage, and upon whose current you are carried down, till, with consternation, you find yourself at the very entrance of it, just ready to emerge into the wide ocean, where you will find no more banks—no more agreeable prospects to charm the eye—no more cheerful companions—no more objects to gratify the senses. or indulge your favorite taste and inclination ; all these sources of delight will vanish for ever. Having, by an irresistible impulse, entered this boundless expanse, alone and unattended, how will you support the idea, that there is nothing remaining to you, but this immensity with which you are surrounded ?

This image, so often applied, and which affected in a most lively manner, even in the midst of her pleasures, the ingenious Sevigne, is but a faint resemblance of its archetype. The current of time, whose rapidity you cannot oppose, and of which you have already passed a considerable part, will carry you into the presence of your Judge—a Being of perfect purity and holiness—Who is divested of all those passions, which the poverty of human language has ascribed to him, and of whose violence we need not therefore be afraid. But although he is infinitely good, he does not approve of sin, nor regard good and evil with an eye of indifference. These two things are naturally and essentially different: and being thus diametrically opposite to each other, cannot be held in the same estimation by a Being, who not only knows their difference, but sees them both without any disguise or artifice. Even man, imperfect and guilty as he is, disapproves and despises the liar, the traitor, the ungrateful, and the envious; but the opposite qualities he honors and admires wherever they are found. How much more then will He, who is absolute perfection, who can never judge otherwise than agreeably to moral rectitude and truth, abhor and detest vice? If God sees, as it were, with a glance,

the moral good and evil of his creatures, and yet makes no discrimination in human actions, a universal disorder must take place amongst all intelligent beings, which disorder would be the inevitable consequence of this supposed indifference in God.

We cannot form a competent idea of the Supreme Being ; he is superior to every image which derives its origin from the senses. It is, however, certain that he is omnipotent, all-wise, and infinite in every perfection. We have every possible reason to think, that betwixt this Being and man, there are other creatures, who approach nearer to God in sanctity, virtue, and perfection ; and who are far superior to man. I know, that, in strict propriety of speech, there cannot be an uniform gradation betwixt finite and infinite : but the distance between God and feeble mortals is so immense, that we may suppose, with the highest probability, that, in the celestial habitations, are beings of a much more excellent nature than man, whose understanding is so much limited, and whose heart is so exceedingly depraved. How great then is the pride of man, which will not admit of any thing superior to himself ! Presuming upon his own dignity, he appropriates a rank more elevated than his faculties intitle him to ; but refus-

es, at the same time, to acknowledge, that he received these endowments from God.— Will the great Governor of the universe approve of this behaviour in his creature; who dares to harbour in his breast a kind of rebellion against the arrangements of infinite Wisdom? Can the man, who is thus influenced by pride, ever condescend to these submissions which reason requires; or bear with an eye of complacency the pre-eminence of beings more noble and exalted than himself? Can he, without a mortifying humiliation, behold himself placed in the lowest rank of finite beings; or resign without murmuring, those prerogatives which he vainly arrogates?

All other transgressions of the law of God are equally, in their own nature, deserving of punishment, by the Sovereign Judge, who disapproves of, and condemns them; for his laws are an eternal and immutable standard for the trial of human actions, of which he surely is capable of making a just estimate, who perfectly knows their value and extent. Beings, who live in subordination to his laws, must necessarily receive the approbation of him whose faithful subjects they are. But such as neglect those duties which are intrinsically good, and, though commanded to obey them, prefer an opposite

rule of behaviour—as the liar, the envious, the cruel, the impure, and the misanthrope—must infallibly be regarded by God as rebels to his laws, and punished for their disobedience. The delay of judgment ought not to embolden them. Men may lose the remembrance of their own actions; the impressions which the senses receive, diminish gradually, like one who having sensibly offended us to-day justly apprehends our resentment; but after a few months are past, forgets the offence, and regards it with indifference. But in God there is no forgetfulness: the faults of the first men are recorded in the book of immutable wisdom, and are written in a manner more indelible than if they were inscribed upon columns of adamant. The sins of the early ages are as perfectly known to him now, as they were at the time they were committed. His hatred to evil is unalterable, as well as its consequences. An action, which had incurred his displeasure, because it was evil in its own nature, cannot change its complexion by time, in the eyes of Infinite Wisdom. After a thousand years, its turpitude will be the same as at first: and therefore entitled to the same condemnation. But such is the inconsistency of the human mind, that we overlook the criminality of

our own actions, and pass a general amnesty on our former vices, when we can no longer practise them. It is not so with the immortal Judge, who hath before him his own laws; so that he cannot pardon, at one time, what was obnoxious to punishment at another.

You, my daughter, will not here object, that we are not so depraved. The education which you have received, and your own conscience, will not suffer this arrogant thought to enter into your mind. But our new philosophers have carried their vanity so far as even to deny the corruption of the human heart: or at least they do not perceive its existence, but in their enemies, or the most notorious malefactors; in them they discover the enormities of vice. It is a weak apology, made by some for the commission of evil, that man brings into the world with him the source of it, which is self-love—that every one must pursue the bent of its inclination—submit wholly to it, and make, if possible, the rest of mankind subservient to its will—that it is oftentimes displeased even with the elements, and would quarrel with the sky if the wind blew, or the rain fell, differently from its wishes. When heavy bodies, by their own weight, descend to the earth, this also is a

cause of pain and inquietude ; it would have them act in repugnance to the laws of gravitation. In the infant, we see the effects of self-love ; it there reigns absolute. Before he has become capable of feeling the influence of example, he opposes his feeble strength to every constraint ; he seizes with a kind of fury whatever he desires ; he snatches from another infant his toys ; and invades, like an Alexander, what is not his own ; like him too, he triumphs over his spoils, and is deaf to every remonstrance of reason.

When the infant is advanced in years, and reason begins to exert its powers, he then perceives that the world is not his own, but that other men have the same pretensions and similar claims to what he would appropriate to himself ; the consequence of which is, at least in theory, a kind of war amongst all those who aspire at universal monarchy. Hobbes not only perceived the truth of this theory, but has plainly asserted that it was now in practice ; though he does not say that such a state of contention is lawful and reasonable. I have observed these sentiments to prevail amongst the most miserable and vilest of men. I have seen the contempt which they had for others : but the complacency and approbation

with which they have contemplated all that they did themselves ;—a way of thinking which Boileau hath finely described in his inimitable satires ; where those haughty tyrants, who would hold the world in subjection, are drawn in their genuine colors. A female philosopher of this class has been ingenuous enough to confess, that if wishes were able to commit murder, those who are in possession of the things which they covet, and which they think would make them happy, would be in great danger of losing their lives. Ofray, another of these philosophers, hath attempted to vindicate vice upon certain principles which he has formed into a system ; the foundation of which is, that virtue is an exotic, planted in our hearts with some degree of violence, or, in other words, by the efforts of education ; on the contrary, vice may be called an indigenous production, which there flourishes, as in a kindly soil, and favorable to its growth.

A superficial view of human nature, or of our own heart, not entirely ignorant of its duties, must convince us, that man, even in a civilized state, confines his love and his esteem to himself—that he easily discovers the faults of other men—that he thinks them inferior to himself—that the grand and prin-

principal scope of all his actions, is the satisfaction of his own desires; whatever they may be; and that he leaves no method untried, by which he may gratify his vanity, or accomplish those ends which the brutal passions of Barbarians pursue in a more open, undisguised manner.

I have often observed, not without a mixture of pleasantry and concern, the mean and despicable jealousy which the greatest philosophers and most celebrated poets have had of one another; and how they have endeavored to tarnish that merit in a rival, which threatened to equal or eclipse their own. With what rancour and invective have they attacked those who refused them the incense of praise! What indecent railleries have they employed, when they would expose to ridicule such as were not servile enough to think as they did! After having shot all their empoisoned arrows against those persons whom they hated without a cause, they scrupled not to say, with an air of affected indifference—"I was only in sport."

There are some persons who deny the corruption of human nature; yet these very men, if their pride receives the least mortification, are immediately inflamed with resentment, and treat the supposed aggressor as their mortal enemy.

It is not amongst the champions of vice alone that we are to look for instances of this depravity of mankind. Turn your eyes, my dear child, unto yourself; examine your own heart—that heart, filled with sweetness and beneficence; which hath never given the least disquietude to your parents, your husband, or your friends—that heart, so compassionate, and susceptible of the tenderest and most benevolent sentiments; which rejoices to see virtue recompensed, though in a stranger, whose affliction also it can soothe and mollify.—Compare your thoughts and actions with the perfect and invariable laws of God, and see how far you are removed from that perfection, which alone can render you acceptable to the Supreme Being. It cannot be envy which induces me thus to degrade a person whom I love; but the sacred obligation of truth impels me to place before your eyes this divine law, that you may the better judge of the imperfection of human actions.

You have been instructed in your younger years, in the truths of the Christian faith; they made a lively impression upon your mind. You also apprehend the right which there is in God of exacting from us a voluntary obedience: and you have a just sense of the importance of eternity, in comparison

of which, thrones and sceptres, honors and distinctions, which men so eagerly grasp at, are but as toys. What are our amusements which we pursue with such avidity? and what are the prerogatives which we are so fond of exercising over creatures as weak and infirm as ourselves? Ought not a being, who is possessed of an immortal soul, and who, to-morrow, may enter into eternity, for which state he was created—ought he not to employ the present day, with every exertion of his mental powers, to rise above this world; though perhaps the greatest superiority which his reason can attain to will be scarce perceptible in that scale of eminence and dignity which, at last, reaches to the Deity himself? or ought he to confine his whole attention to secular concerns, to procure the favor of a man, whom probably he despises in his heart; or to amass wealth, which he must soon leave behind him? And yet do not these things, so contemptible in themselves, occupy all our days, and employ all our thoughts?

Betwixt the present moment and eternity, we flatter ourselves with a long interval of life; and though it is so short that it may be compared to the twinkling of an eye; yet in our imagination it appears without end; or at least we remove that end to so

remote a distance, that we conceive a greater relish for present joys, and value them at too high a rate. We consider the present as the only true, the only sure and important happiness : futurity, dark and obscure; hath no charms, no evidence sufficient to determine our will.

It is this trifling estimate, which we make of eternity, that renders us indolent and careless in the great duties which we owe to God—that makes us ungrateful for his favors, deaf to his menaces, negligent of his service, cold in our devotions, and untouched with the sufferings of our Saviour. The value which we put upon present enjoyments, attaches our affections to the perishable things of this life, and excites in us an odium against those who would interrupt our pursuits, or rival us in them. From hence proceed the vain opinions we have of our own merit; the custom of secretly comparing it with that of other men, *of our acting unjustly in consequence of these partial comparisons*; an inward envy at the prospect of advantages which they enjoy, and of which we judge them unworthy; a ridiculous approbation of our own actions and abilities; an ungovernable passion for frivolous amusements; the shameful sacrifice of a great part of our time, in the search of

fleeting pleasures, which make a man neither better nor wiser ; and a petulancy of temper, that will bear no opposition to our desires which we are so eager to gratify, and wait with such impatience for the arrival of the happy moment, that time seems to move with leaden feet.

But, to close this mortifying detail, we will suppose that, after many victories gained by vice, its superior influence should at last give place to the repeated impressions of divine truth, and its power should be considerably diminished.—Reflect, then, upon what passes within you, and you will be obliged to confess that, even in this situation, things temporal operate upon our minds with more force than things eternal ; and that the thoughts of futurity have but too little effect upon our inclination. We find this imperfection in men who are yet the least addicted to the practice of vice ; its influence is particularly felt in that age when the passions are in their greatest vigor. How many criminal desires have taken full possession of our hearts in the course of a short life ! how many resolutions have we formed for the indulgence of the passions, even those of the most guilty kind, though our reason has convinced us of the shame and indignity of such a proceeding !

how often have the passions silenced all the remonstrances of reason ! how often have they tempted even the best of men into the commission of the most criminal actions ; of which the Psalmist is a memorable instance ! Such as we are, however, we must all appear before the tribunal of the perfect Judge ! What heart will not tremble, when the faithful register of all our evil thoughts and actions will be opened before us ? What must they expect, who, having spent their best days in the service of the passions, enfeebled by age, and terrified with the idea of approaching death, relinquished at last their vices, and, like the prodigal in the gospel, sought an asylum from the frightful reproaches of their own conscience, in the arms of paternal compassion ? Will they be rejected by the kindest and most benevolent of Beings ? will their sincere repentance be of no avail ? or, if they should be received into favor, who will efface the long catalogue of sins from the records of everlasting Wisdom ?

This question, my dear, is very ancient ; it has been asked by the sagest philosophers. Socrates, who considered the study of virtue as the only employment which deserved the attention of wise men, thus proposes it—*How can sinful man make his peace with*

God ? But shall we, weak and short-sighted mortals as we are—shall we presume to fathom the counsels of the Almighty ? Socrates confessed his doubts and uncertainty ; and that he was not able to comprehend the determination and judgment of God with respect to sin ; or how it will escape the effects of his hatred who is infinitely holy, and of purer eyes than to behold iniquity. He still continued, however, to consider God as a merciful Being : and this mercy was to him a source of confidence.—“ I doubt not,” says he, “ but God will send, at a time when his infinite wisdom shall see fit, a man instructed by himself, who shall reveal to the world this most interesting of all mysteries—how he will pardon sins ?”

LETTER III.

Ignorance and scepticism of the most enlightened Hea-then Philosophers, with regard to the great principles of morality and natural religion. Faint notions of a Mediator among the ancient Oriental Nations; but none among the Greeks and Romans. Christianity could be established only by Divine Power. A divine person sent into the world for the instruction of mankind, and the expiation of their sins. The grand doctrines of Christianity, which are familiar to our minds, strange and wonderful to those to whom they are entirely new.

GIVE thanks with me, my child, to the Supreme Judge, who, though he can neither excuse nor approve of any evil actions, averts, however, from his guilty creatures, the punishment which they have incurred. I am confident you understand my meaning; let us therefore praise his holy Being, who, notwithstanding his dislike to sin, hath found out a way to receive the sinner into favour, to purify him, and to render him capable of enjoying his presence through endless ages.

He hath himself revealed to us this mystery, so incomprehensible to human wisdom; and hath, in reality, accomplished those hopes, which Socrates had conceived from the goodness of God. But this scheme, being so infinitely great, hath much surpassed all the expectations of that philo-

sopher. The Supreme Being hath manifested his will by a man endowed with extraordinary gifts and abilities. [I shall have occasion, hereafter, to shew how little we might expect from mere man, towards the reformation of the world.] From what has happened, we may form a conclusion of what would have been the probable effect, if God had sent this embassy by one of the sons of men, and entrusted him with the mystery of reconciliation. The Greeks, a people highly civilized, whose natural talents seem to have been much superior to those who lived in climates less favourable, had, notwithstanding all their boasted wisdom, but an imperfect idea of the principal and most simple truths. The existence of God the Creator—the plainest and most obvious truth of all—was a subject of doubt and controversy amongst their men of learning.—With respect to the immortality of the soul, the wisest amongst them, it is true, entertained some rays of hope; but all was dark and obscure; there were no proofs, nor certainty. The famous Confucius appears even to have had no idea of this interesting doctrine; his philosophy is nothing but a system of political conduct. One sect of these philosophers, it must be confessed, have considered morals in a very favourable point

of view ; but another party, more sincere, because they spoke from the feelings of their own heart, have placed the sovereign good in voluptuousness ; and those principles, in Greece as well as in Rome, were adapted to the general taste.

A future life was, in the opinion of the virtuous Romans, and even of the grave Juvenal, a childish conceit ; and in regard to the great point of religion and morals, the philosophers themselves were not able to instruct the people in what manner they should think or act. Men of the greatest integrity among the Heathens, as Cicero, for example, whose sincerity appears unimpeachable, looked upon religion as a contrivance of the state, to which custom had given a kind of prescriptive sanction.—The consequence of which was—that the manners of the people, both in Greece and Rome, after the introduction of philosophy amongst them, became, without comparison, more corrupt than they were at a time when they had scarce emerged from barbarism.

If human wisdom had not the power of convincing men of the natural difference betwixt good and evil, and of the existence of a Sovereign Judge—if these two points of doctrine have not been generally received, how much less would it have been pos-

sible to persuade men by reason alone, of the truth of that mystery which they could have no idea of? We find, indeed, that the ancient oriental nations had some faint notions of a Mediator; which were probably derived from the remote traditions of the sons of Noah. These people believed in one God, eternal, immaterial, and infinite; their worship was without images and without temples. But amongst the Greeks and Romans, who were the farthest removed from the immediate descendants of Noah, whose tradition seems to have been the only source of those other truths, the knowledge of which has been preserved, we find not the least trace of this only means of reconciling God to man; and indeed, amongst the greatest part of the oriental nations, whatever remains there were of truth, idolatry had almost extinguished.

That it was not in the power of man, destitute of every succour from above, to promulgate and establish the doctrine of redemption, appears very evident, when we reflect on the opposition which Christianity encountered at its commencement; for we are not to consider those men, who were commissioned to announce this doctrine, revealed at first to them, as possessed of natural powers only; the apostles were endued

with extraordinary gifts, and therefore were above the common level of mankind ; they had seen the Mediator who was to effect this redemption ; they had enjoyed the benefit of his conversation ; had always attended, and even lived with him. Other persons likewise, whom they had converted to the faith, had been eye-witnesses of the actions of Jesus, and supported the narrations of the apostles by their own testimony. The ambassadors of the heavenly messenger were armed, if I may so express myself, with supernatural powers, which evidently confirmed their Divine commission. But yet, what resistance did not the pride of man make to the preaching of the cross ? What infidelity may we not remark in the most judicious Roman writers, whenever they had occasion to speak of Christ ? The truth, we confess, hath at last made its way and been victorious. But if it had been established by human means only—if the divinity of our Saviour had not been manifested by characters that could not be mistaken, the Christian religion would never have been received by nations where a system of regular government prevailed.

In order to bring this work to a happy termination, God hath performed more than the wisest men could have required. He

hath united, though in a manner entirely incomprehensible, his Divine perfections to human nature, but in a subject absolutely free from sin. He hath announced to the world the glad tidings of salvation, by this extraordinary envoy, whose character is beyond all comparison. This distinguished personage came from heaven ; and whilst he was upon earth, declared that he was sent by God himself, with whom he had dwelt before the commencement of time, and with whom he was coeval. He was not only the messenger of this great salvation, which was to be effected by some propitiatory sacrifice ; but he was himself to be the victim slain for the atonement of the sins of mankind.

There is something in this mystery so profound as to astonish the understanding, and to baffle the powers of reason. A Being eternal, infinite, and incomprehensible, appears to the world in the form of one of its meanest inhabitants ; and submits to this indignity for the benefit and advantage of so wretched a creature as man, whom he instructs in all useful doctrines during his continuance upon earth, until he was put to a cruel and ignominious death.

This is the Christian creed. We imbibe it from our infancy ; but the ideas which are

thereby excited, becoming familiar to us, lose their energy; and yet how strange must they have appeared to those to whom they were entirely new! How incomprehensible is this alliance of the eternal with the finite, of the uncreated with the created, of the government of the whole world with a subjection to pain!

LETTER IV.

Divine Mission of Jesus Christ. To Him were united all those qualities which bespeak the true Ambassador of God. We believe the existence of many things, the manner of whose existence we can neither ascertain nor comprehend. This Doctrine illustrated from observations and reasonings on the properties of bodies, or physical existence. Application of it to spiritual subjects.

I SHALL not attempt to explain this great mystery ; let the relation of it suffice. At a time precisely marked by the ancient prophecies, there appeared a person endued with extraordinary powers ; he communicated to men a doctrine, which he declared he had received from God, and taught them what were the means which God, in his infinite wisdom, had adopted to expiate their transgressions. This divine person performed all the conditions to which this pardon was annexed ; and, taking upon himself the sins of the world, shed forth his blood in order to efface them. If it is true that this messenger or envoy of God hath actually appeared in the world—if it is true that his words have been faithfully preserved—if it is true that he hath confirmed his heavenly mission by an infinite number of miracles, and that his doctrine excelled, both in wisdom and purity, all that the united ef-

forts of men have ever been able to discover —if the sanctity of his life corresponded with the precepts he had delivered; and, lastly, if this eminent person hath been equally incapable of deceiving and being deceived, equally exempt from error and falsehood, we may then answer this grand question, *How can man make his peace with God? How can guilty mortals wait with confidence the sentence of the Sovereign Judge?*—Nothing now remains but the proof of his appearance. I shall, therefore, endeavor to inquire, what are the distinguishing marks which ought to characterise a messenger sent from God; and to shew that they all met in the person of Jesus of Nazareth; for in him were united all those qualities which should evidence the true ambassador of God; from whence we must conclude that all his words are true. It would be no proof of good sense to question the veracity of such a person. What man is there, who hath at all reflected on the narrow limits of the human understanding, and hath in the least studied nature, but hath had occasion to remark, that we are assured, from experience, of the existence of a great number of facts which are contrary to our speculations?—When we could examine the doubtful principles upon which we pretend to decide on

the credibility of things, we may easily perceive how little the objections, which are suggested to us by the feeble lights by which we are directed in our researches, should hinder us from believing that which is marked with the impression of truth. In material objects, we are daily obliged to confess, that what appeared to us as contradictory, is however true, and that of necessity ; with how much more reason then may we apply this observation to things which are spiritual. It is from experience, or from the conformity of a great number of events, that we ordinarily deduce the measure of possibility, or the rules by which to form our judgment ; these are confined within certain limitations, beyond which we cannot penetrate. Who can comprehend, for example, a Being who hath existed from all eternity, and who is without beginning ? Yet the enemies of revelation confess the necessity of such a Being ; demonstrative evidence forces from them this confession. Is not this acknowledging, that a thing really exists, which, however, is repugnant to all our conceptions ? And are not the divisibility of bodies, and their motions, amongst those things which are incomprehensible ? The last is proved by the evidence of the senses ; but yet the understanding forms no

clear idea of it: The first is admitted from the proofs of reason, though it has all the appearance of impossibility.—This instance hath been often proposed; it is not the less true, because of its application to our subject. An African hath never had an opportunity of seeing that water was capable of solidity, and of cutting like a piece of metal; an European hath never seen that mercury could be fixed, and become like solid silver. When, therefore, the African concludes, from an infinite number of experiments, the result of which is always the same, that water will never lose its fluidity; and when an European makes a similar conclusion relative to mercury, from the same principle, it is manifest that they both form erroneous deductions, by reasoning from the constant experience of all men and all times.

And whence is the cause of these errors? A variety of facts and occurrences pass in review before us; from particular cases, we are too apt to draw a general inference, and conclude that they must all resemble one another, though perhaps there are many of them which we have not seen.

If, then, we are liable to error, in regard to the properties of bodies, which, notwithstanding, are subject to the examination of

the senses, and if experience oftentimes obliges us to retract the judgment which we had formed; how much more cautious ought we to be in pronouncing our opinions on the properties of spirit; or in presuming to determine on the impossibility of a thing, because we have not proved it, and are not able to comprehend its essence or manner!

All that we would pretend to infer from these reflections is, that the difficulties which present themselves, in every kind of truths, though we may not be in a condition to form an absolute determination upon them, should not prevent us from giving them our assent when once they are sufficiently proved.—How little reason then have we to be surprised, if we meet with difficulties in conceiving the manner of the union betwixt God and man; since we have certain proofs that our Saviour, who was incapable of falsehood, hath represented himself as partaking of the Divine Nature?

LETTER V.

Internal evidence of the Christian religion necessary, though not alone sufficient for its confirmation. Digression to Dr. Boerhaave. Humble birth and education of Jesus Christ. The wisdom and purity of his moral precepts. Superior excellence of the morality of the gospel to that of the wisest and most virtuous heathens, illustrated from the precepts concerning forgiveness of injuries, and mental purity or chastity. A description of the miseries flowing from unlawful love. To direct the views of mankind to eternity, the great object of the doctrines and precepts of Jesus Christ.— The sincerity with which our Saviour warned his disciples of the sufferings which awaited him and themselves also, a proof that he acted not on human principles. A messenger from God an uncommon phenomenon. The proofs of his mission must be more convincing than those with which we are contented in the common occurrences of life.

THE excellency and purity of the doctrine of Christ are not alone sufficient to prove his divinity, or the intimate union of the divine with the human nature. But if the doctrines of Christianity were unworthy of God, this circumstance alone would sufficiently evince that God was not their author. However excellent any doctrine may be, its excellence alone will not be a convincing proof that the teacher is divinely inspired, or that the Divinity dwells within him. It is, however, a necessary preliminary towards the establishment of this truth. We should never regard a man as a teach-

er sent from God, if his doctrine is not holy, and conformable to the perfections of him from whom he says it proceeds. In return, it will give a more favorable idea of him who teaches it; it will shine with no borrowed splendor; and will furnish more ample instructions than ever were communicated by a mortal man.

Fifty years have almost elapsed since I was the disciple of the immortal Boerhaave; but his image is continually present to my mind. I have always before my eyes the venerable simplicity of that great man, who possessed, in an eminent degree, the talent of persuading. How many times hath he said, when speaking of the precepts of our Saviour—*that this divine teacher knew mankind better than Socrates.*

But what was Jesus in himself, when we abstract from his person every thing that was supernatural! He was the son of a mechanic, who was the parent of fishermen of no rank in the world. He had no master to instruct him; he had read nothing but the writings of Moses and the Prophets, and had received no lessons from the Socrateses, the Platos, the Confuciuses of the age: yet what was the doctrine taught by this son of a common mechanic—this man, whose relations were all of them men of obscure birth, unimprov-

ed by education, and without any tincture of science? That the simple *desire* of committing a crime, is itself a sin; a truth, which though considered in the present times as incontestible, and as the necessary result of a right conception of the nature of the human mind, was nevertheless a doctrine entirely new, when taught by Christ. The Jews, it is true, regarded, as unlawful, many things which were considered also as faults by the wisest heathens; though their notions of their criminality did not rest upon just foundations. Those things only, in their apprehension, were morally evil, which were prohibited by the law, or which were repugnant to the happiness of society. But they condemned only the action itself; *that* alone they thought worthy of punishment—a distinction not only absurd, but in some measure self-contradiction.—When a debauched person fills his imagination with obscene pictures, the lewd ideas which he recalls, fail not to stimulate his desires with a degree of violence that he cannot resist. This will be necessarily followed by gratification, unless some external obstacle should prevent him from the commission of a sin which he had internally resolved on.

No dishonorable ideas will ever be form-

ed in the pure soul of a virtuous woman; but if they should obtrude themselves on the mind, and there meet with a favorable reception, she will be disarmed of her modesty, and fall an easy prey to the first temptation. It did not escape the observation of our Saviour, that the rejection of any evil thought was the best defence against vice.—Every moment of time that is spent in meditations on sin, increases the power of the dangerous object which has possessed our imagination. Anger adds fuel to the flames, which a change of the situation of the body might have extinguished at the beginning. The illustrious Boerhaave has often admired this sentence of our Saviour: *Whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her, hath committed adultery already with her in his heart.* This maxim was in reality included in the ancient law against adultery. But mankind, through the blindness of their passions, could not discern it. By this short precept, Christ hath prescribed in the most efficacious manner, the means of preserving us from sin. The first attacks of vice are generally feeble; reason has then some power over the mind; if then, at the very moment that such thoughts occur to us as have a tendency to withdraw us from our duty, we shall with all diligence

suppress them, and employ our attention on other things, we may avoid the approaching danger, nor fall under the dominion of vice. But on the contrary, if we encourage these ideas and are fond of contemplating them, they will not fail to entice us into evil.

This law, which subjects even our thoughts to the divine tribunal, is the only means of security in social life. Human justice hath no power over the passions and desires of the heart; neither will it accomplish the end proposed by the legislator. It will never banish crimes, though it may punish criminals. It is not possible, but that a mind, daily occupied in reflecting on the seductive allurements of voluptuousness, will devote itself to enjoyment as soon as it perceives a fit opportunity of procuring that satisfaction, the simple idea of which has afforded so much pleasure. When we speak of the enjoyments of sense, we mean all the vices without distinction. The tribunals of human justice oppose them only with terror, in cases where they are made manifest by their effects. Is it not easy for a man blinded by his passions, to persuade himself, that he can conceal his faults from the eyes of his fellow creatures? It is not difficult for him, when his desires have obtained the sovereignty, to banish from his mind

every idea that can oppose them. Will he not suppress all thoughts of future punishment, during the time that he fixes his affections upon present pleasures? But the doctrine of Christ is not confined to the cutting off the young shoots of these venomous plants; it destroys them in the bud, as the only means of preventing their growth. He who hath God always before him, in whom the fear of this tremendous Judge is one prevailing sentiment, and whose judgments are constantly before his eyes, will never attend to the vicious suggestions of his own heart; he will shut his ears against the voice of those enchanting Syrens; he will not suffer any impure ideas to defile his imagination; he will not even be *exposed* to the danger of falling into the last stage of a vice, of which he abhorred the very beginnings. That the man who considers sin as the greatest of all evils, and indeed, as the only evil, should at once abandon himself to its utmost excesses, is indeed impossible: nor is it unlikely that a man who guards against the first attacks of vice, will be able to elude its power—But he who begins to fall, has no power to stop his progress; every moment increases his rapidity, till at length he plunges to the very bottom of the precipice.

It was a fatal error which prevailed amongst the Jews as well as Pagans, that we could make satisfaction to God for sins, and procure his kindness, by oblation and presents offered in the temples consecrated to his worship, and by a scrupulous observance of the ceremonial rights prescribed in the law: but these surely could not improve the man or sanctify his heart.—Nothing contributed more than this persuasion to quiet the guilty mind, and to banish from it all fear of the Almighty—that fear which is the beginning of wisdom. If a king, by the sacrifice of his son, could deliver himself from extreme danger, we should see him armed with a poniard against the person of one, that is notwithstanding dear to him, and eagerly spilling that blood, the effusion of which is demanded by the supreme law of self-preservation. If the building of a sacred edifice could expiate treasons and murders, how little would they affect the impious hearts of those who could defray this expense? If a rich sinner, by paying double tythes out of his large revenues, could render himself acceptable to God, would he not have the means in his own hands of transgressing at pleasure, and with impunity? The expenditure of wealth would not be to them so great a sacrifice, as

to part with a favorite vice, which has been the source of pleasure. How much more agreeable, then, will that religion be, which affords the means of grace, by the observance of certain formalities or exterior rights; and obliges not its votaries at the same time, to subdue their criminal appetites, in which they may indulge without depriving themselves of the favor of their Judge, whose pardon for past faults they can purchase at so easy a rate! By a purchase, I mean all those outward forms to which a sinner has recourse, in order to make his God propitious, without correcting his vices, or reforming his life. 'The pain to which the fanatic Indian submits, when enclosed in a vessel stuck with sharp points, pious legacies, abstinence from certain meals, a particular kind of dress, and other formalities of a like kind, are means very inefficacious for satisfying the justice of an holy and righteous Judge. If we read the gospel with the smallest attention, we may observe, that there is no error which is there attacked in more severe terms, than the fatal security into which a vicious people are lulled by wicked and artful priests.— Christ, the finisher of our faith, clearly foresaw the baneful effects of this soporiferous poison, and how ineffectual it would render

that religion which he had brought from heaven. Nothing is more flattering to men than the hopes of salvation, without being obliged to offer any violence to their favorite inclinations. The wise and animating precepts of our divine legislator have been scarce sufficient to prevent Christians from falling into this dangerous delusion.

It is not my design to give you, my daughter, a detail of the morality of the gospel. This task has been performed by others, who are more versed in it than myself. I would only in this place take notice of the forgiveness of injuries, a virtue almost unknown to the Jews; and though it was highly extolled by some of the wisest heathens, yet their practice by no means corresponded with the precept. And here it may not be improper to observe, that we often judge of the actions of Elias, of David, and of other holy men, by the laws of Christ. The forgiveness of injuries is the characteristic of a great mind; we are not unacquainted with it in theory; and we have seen examples of it upon the stage, which we have considered as the natural effect of virtuous principles, imbibed in the heart, though unregenerated. But in ancient times, this maxim, so essential to a pure morality, was altogether unknown.

This is evident from all the most ancient poets and historians.—Are not all the gods and heroes of Homer implacable?—The kindness of David to Saul, his mortal enemy, is the only instance to be met with of this virtuous temper. We find no other example of this divine principle in those rude times of violence and anarchy.

I cannot quit this subject without remarking some other excellencies of the morality of Christ—a morality so superior to the prejudices of the vulgar. Ancient nations, in general, adored as gods such as had formerly been men, and lived amongst them; they supposed also that their enemies had the same kind of local deities. Even the Jews, to whom God had revealed himself in all his majesty and terror, suffered, notwithstanding, an idea so contrary to his infinite perfection, to enter into their gross minds. *The Temple—The Temple*, was a sacred expression amongst them; and demonstrated the vain prejudice which prevailed throughout their whole nation—that God was only *their* God. It was this mistaken opinion which induced them to reject a salvation that was intended for all mankind; their pride would not permit them to partake of it with others. But Jesus, though born amongst them, though a Jew by birth, clearly proved

by his own conduct, that all these natural animosities—all those extraordinary privileges claimed by one sect over another, were destitute of every reasonable foundation. He refused not to converse with a woman of Samaria; a nation despised at Jerusalem. He made a discovery of himself to her in more express terms than he had done to any one before; he ate, and continued for some time, with this woman, whom his countrymen treated with contempt. He inculcated also, in a parable, the principle of universal charity, by preferring the Samaritan, who had exercised it, to the Jewish priest who had neglected this very important duty. He hath excluded from salvation all those who profess his doctrine, but content themselves with a bare profession. He has openly declared, that those who regarded themselves as true believers, and as being the descendants of Abraham, should nevertheless suffer a greater condemnation than was reserved for Tyre and Sidon. Notwithstanding the advantages and prerogatives which were peculiar to the Jews from their birth, and from the writings of the prophets, yet the Saviour of the world expressly forbade them from placing a vain confidence in those considerations more than in the purity of their religion.

He warned them against expecting the approbation of God, because they had rigorously observed all the rights of the ceremonial law. It was not from men that our Saviour had learned a morality so pure and holy; for such is its repugnance to all the emotions of their corrupt hearts, that even to this day there are many among the disciples of Christ who presume to call themselves the elect of God, and to condemn all others who are not of their sect or persuasion.

There is yet another feature which marks the excellency of the Christian doctrine; and that is, the purity which it requires in what is called our natural desires, but which are oftentimes too impetuous to be restrained by the laws of religion; I here mean the passion which unites the sexes—a passion which exercises dominion over the most generous and tender hearts. The philosophers both of Greece and China have considered this propensity as necessarily resulting from the frame and constitution of man; they have therefore treated it with much lenity and indulgence; though the abuse of it is not less common, nor less pernicious, than either pride or avarice, which two passions they have attacked with the most powerful arguments, and painted in

the blackest colours. Even the wise Socrates could pardon, in some measure, these deviations from virtue, under the notion that they were the effects of a brutal instinct, to which even the best men were subject. It does not appear that the philosophers thought there was any thing disgraceful in this vice; they rather considered it as a very venial fault in youth. Men of virtue in Greece, in Rome, and in China, even the two Antonini, have not blamed this promiscuous commerce of the sexes in others, and have even indulged it in themselves.

As I am writing to one of the female sex, I am sensible that I ought to treat this subject with the greatest delicacy; it is that consideration which prevents me from representing this vice in its genuine colours; I must therefore confine myself to such a description of it as may not give any offence to modesty. Unlawful love enfeebles all the powers of the soul, diverts it from every thing that is serious, and gives it a distaste both of moral duty, and of whatever requires a certain degree of labor. It is attended with a long train of embarrassments, troubles, and misfortunes: it destroys the harmony and mutual confidence on which the happiness of the marriage state depends: it involves its unhappy votaries in unneces-

sary expenses, and engages them in habits hurtful to society : it shuts our eyes against the prospect of eternity—awful in its own nature, but rendered more dreadful by the consciousness of a wicked course of life—and more closely rivets our affections to the things of this world, which, after death, cannot follow us. Jesus was born amongst a people where polygamy was allowed ; where the unlawful commerce of the sexes was countenanced, and where divorces were common : and so complacent were the interpreters of the law, at that time, that the most trifling causes were sufficient to procure a separation. The son of a carpenter made his appearance amongst the Jews, at a period when they were thus misled by their teachers. He preached to them the necessity of a more regular life, and of a purity of manners at that time unknown.—But this precept of the gospel is familiar to modern times : honorable mention is made of it in all our treatises of morality : it is even introduced into our dramatic writings ; and, in our commerce with the world, it is considered, as it were, a common or ordinary duty. But when Jesus entered upon his divine commission, he was the only teacher who recommended chastity to men, who required of them conjugal fidelity, who

reprobated the opposite vices, and condemned all impurity both in their desires and in their thoughts. From whence then came this law of chastity and temperance, which no man before had thought of imposing on the world as a duty? It came not from man; it derived not its source from the hearts in which those very passions that it condemned had taken root: but we must look up to him as the author of it, who was instructed by God! who commanded his disciples to be perfect, as our Father which is in heaven is perfect.

All the benefits of the doctrine of Christ seem to concenter in this one point—that eternity is the grand object we should have in view—consequently, that the main business of our lives should be to prepare for it, and that we should esteem the favor of God as the only true good. These ideas did not originate in the heart of man; no Socrates had perceived them; they were unknown to the Jews, notwithstanding the bright Luminary destined to enlighten the world was first to shine upon them.

Agreeably to this fundamental rule, our Saviour condemns in his followers that care and solicitude which are so incessantly occupied in the affairs of this world. He requires that we should sacrifice all that is

dear to us, rather than submit to the pollutions of sin. He warns us, that the way of life is narrow and difficult : and that we cannot, without tribulation, enter into the kingdom of heaven. He has cautioned us to dread the indignation of the Deity, as the only evil which ought to alarm us. The wisest philosophers amongst the heathens knew but little of a life to come ; they never spake of it but in very doubtful and ambiguous terms. Their lessons, therefore, had not, upon the heart, that authority which alone can subdue the will, and which, in our Saviour, was a manifestation of his divine origin. The firm persuasion of a future life, of the being of a just God who will reward or punish men according to their works, is the very soul and essence of the Christian religion.

I place likewise amongst those things which Jesus Christ could not have derived from human wisdom, the sincerity with which he informed his disciples of the sufferings that awaited him, and of those which they also would partake of on earth. He omitted no opportunity to remove from their minds all those temporal hopes which their national prejudices had led them to encourage ; that the kingdom of the Messiah would be of this world, and that he would

appear in all the splendour of a mighty monarch. That our Saviour's design was to establish a spiritual monarchy, and that all his actions corresponded with that design, is another testimony in favour of the Messiah. The artful Mahomet took great care to inform those whom he was desirous to associate with himself for conducting the grand scheme which he had formed, that certain evils would await them, and that certain dangers must be courted. He endeavoured to infuse into them a spirit of heroism ; otherwise they might have been disgusted with their situation, and he might have been deprived of their support. The disciples of our Saviour were men like ourselves ; not the heroes of a stage, in whom the contempt of death is no extraordinary virtue. They feared for their great Leader ; they would have persuaded him to preserve his life ; they were not without apprehensions for themselves, and sought their safety by flight, when they perceived danger approaching ; they forsook their master, for whom they had the greatest affection, and of whom they had entertained the most exalted notions. These were the men to whom Jesus announced that they were to suffer and to die for him. He made this declaration to persons full of the idea of a

victorious Messiah; who had promised themselves a participation of his future grandeur; and who aspired after the first honors in the new kingdom which they expected to see established in Sion—erroneous opinions, but sufficiently characteristic of the propensities of human nature. This proceeding, so singular in its kind, the sincerity with which he informed his followers of the destiny which awaited them, evidently prove that Jesus acted not after the manner of men, nor like the chief of a party, who procure to themselves partizans by the promise of rewards; it was not his design to gain disciples by the alluring offers of temporal advantages.

This unexampled candor and integrity must naturally fix our attention upon the person by whom they were displayed.—They discover a more than human virtue, not to be paralleled in the history of all ages. A messenger from God is not a common phenomenon. Such an event demands our most serious examination; a fact of this nature cannot but be attended with important consequences; the proofs of its divinity must be more convincing than those with which we are contented in the more ordinary occurrences of life.

We have already remarked, that the doc-

trine of Christ was a great testimony in his favor ; and that his wisdom was much superior to that which simple nature was capable of attaining. But I would speak more particularly to the person of this teacher, whose doctrine merits so great admiration. He united in himself all those excellencies which should characterise an heavenly messenger, and such as we may expect in one sent from God, and instructed by him in the truths which he was to promulgate.— But, in a matter of this consequence, we should not be too hasty in our opinion. We should first consider whether the design appears to be worthy of God, and whether the instrument employed was answerable to the execution of it. We should therefore examine his principal actions, the events of his life, the credentials of his divine commission, and whether he was actually sent from heaven into this lower world.

LETTER VI.

The commencement of Christianity. By what means so pure a religion was established in so corrupt a world. The causes that contributed to the rapidity of its progress. The proofs which Christ hath given of his divine mission. Life and character of Jesus Christ.

THAT we may throw the greater light upon this subject, it will be useful to look back to the commencement of Christianity, and examine by what means its author was able to establish a religion so little calculated to please the world in its then state of depravity. We may at the same time extend our inquiries, by considering what were the causes which contributed to the rapidity of its progress, and what were the proofs which Christ hath given of his divine mission. It is well known, that, in the time of Constantine the Great, Christianity was so widely spread, that a council was assembled at Nice, composed of several bishops, that is, of those who had the care of the churches then erected in the principal cities of the empire. After that period, we find all those extensive provinces, from the country of the Parthians as far as Bretagne, filled with Christians. The churches, who confessed the name of Jesus, increased to this astonishing degree, at a time when very severe edicts had been published against them, and

when they groaned under the weight of divers persecutions. A short time before, the artful Dioclesian, who had for an associate in the empire the father of the same Constantine, whom we have just mentioned, had determined to cut off, by fire or the sword, all those who professed the Christian faith; and so highly did he applaud himself on account of his great success, that in order to preserve the memory of this bloody transaction, he caused an inscription to be engraven in marble, which implied—*That he had destroyed the very name of Christian.*

If we examine into a more remote period, towards the beginning of the second century, about 70 years after the death of our Saviour, we shall find, that the Christians were so numerous, that the eloquent Pliny, a Pagan and proconsul of Bithynia, complained, that in his province the altars were abandoned, and the worship of the gods neglected. Further back, even about 30 years after the death of Christ, the Christian religion was so well known, that it excited the jealousy as well of the Pagans as of the Jews; they called it a sect odious to the whole world. The Pagans held it in abhorrence, because of its tendency to abolish the worship of the gods which they adored. The Jews were not the less ene-

mies to the Christians, that they sprung from amongst themselves. The cruel Nero laid to their charge the burning of Rome ; a crime which he had himself committed, from an extravagant vanity, of which it is impossible to assign the causes. Not long after his death they formed a numerous society ; and, even in those early times, there were churches founded at Babylon, in Asia Minor, in Palestine, in Greece, in Italy, in Rome, and in almost all the provinces of the empire. It would be destroying all historical faith, and introducing an absolute pyrrhonism, not to infer from the writings of St. Paul, that under the emperors Nero and Claudius, there were a considerable number of churches in the principal cities, which were under the Roman government ; that bishops (now called priests) and deacons, distinguished for their fidelity, presided over these churches ; that they assembled for the public worship of Almighty God, and for celebrating the communion, by breaking of bread, according to the precept of our Lord, as a memorial of his death ; that they read the scriptures, and explained all the articles of the Christian faith. And to come nearer to that interesting epocha, the death of our Saviour, we find that, not long after this event, there

was a church established at Jerusalem, at Antioch, and in the neighbouring towns.—These first churches were founded by the Apostles themselves, whose painful task it was to preach the gospel in all places whithersoever they went. The ordinary services of the church they entrusted to faithful ministers chosen for that purpose. We find also, that in an assembly of the principal disciples of our Saviour, held at Jerusalem, the grand question was disputed, whether the Gentiles were to be subject to the ceremonial law of Moses.—Were we to trace the Christian doctrine to its origin, we should see that its promulgation and establishment were entrusted to the twelve disciples of Christ—men destitute of every thing which could attract public regard or consideration; such as birth, knowledge, or reputation: yet these were the persons who published abroad the death—the ignominious death of their master. They accompanied him in all his labours and peregrinations; they were the auditors of his instructive lessons; and, being furnished with wisdom which he had communicated to them, they became themselves the teachers of mankind.

Having thus ascended by an historical gradation, I come now to Jesus himself, the

author of the Christian religion; who sprung from the royal house of David, and who devoted his whole life to the great work for which he was sent into the world. He taught like one instructed by God. As another proof of his divine origin, he lived without any of those faults and infirmities to which men are subject. No one could impeach the rectitude of his conduct. His life was an uninterrupted series of instruction and example, both equally wise and holy. His enemies, exasperated at the success of his doctrine, exerted their utmost efforts to stop its progress, and depreciate the estimation in which he was held. But neither the *Celsusses*, the *Porphyries*, the *Julians*, nor the Jews of past or modern times, have dared to attack the purity of his morals. The doubts, therefore, of the free thinkers, whether the virtues ascribed to Jesus were absolutely without blemish, are frivolous and of no avail.

In the whole course of his life we see no traces of ambition or worldly views; he even refused the thanks of those on whom he had performed miraculous cures, and whose deliverance from their various maladies impressed them with the highest sense of gratitude.—And when the people, astonished at the number as well as great-

ness of his miracles, were desirous of placing him on the throne of David, he, by withdrawing himself, refused this proof of their kindness and esteem. He endeavored to eradicate from his disciples all hopes of temporal advantages; and passed his days in voluntary poverty.

To avoid the conversation of men, to whom he appeared *a burning and a shining light*, he passed his nights in solitude and prayer. The gravity of his discourses, the majestic composure with which they were delivered, evidently marked their divine teacher. He spoke *as never man spoke*; this was the declaration of those who heard him, notwithstanding their prejudice against his person and doctrine: and to this testimony I cannot withhold my assent, when I compare his discourses with any of those that have been delivered by the most eminent philosophers of Greece and China. He was continually employed in doing good; not out of ostentation, in performing prodigies wonderful and supernatural, or in severe acts of justice for the punishment of offenders. His actions were more useful than brilliant, calculated to administer to the wants of men, and remedy the incurable evils of their nature. I shall not attempt, in this place, to demonstrate the reality of

these supernatural works; a more favourable opportunity will offer in the sequel. I shall content myself for the present with considering the nature of these miracles, such as the apostles have represented them.

We behold an innocent man delivering himself up to the cruelty of his enemies, and, when his hour was come, cheerfully submitting to the pains of death. If he was an impostor, what could have been his motive in this proceeding? The accusation that he was one, is so daring an instance of impiety, that very few of the enemies of revelation have dared to hazard it. Were voluptuousness, riches or honours, the objects of his pursuit—of him, who constantly preached the great duties of religion; and who suffered some of his disciples to forsake him, because they were terrified with the severity of his precepts, and would continue no longer to be witness of his miracles, or to hear those lessons, which, in their opinion, were too pure and holy?

All the actions of our Saviour—his whole conduct—are perfectly consistent, and form, as it were, one entire piece, as might be expected in an ambassador of God. They all centre in one point—eternity is the sublime subject of his discourses. He surely did not leave the celestial habitations of his Fa-

ther, for the trifling concerns of this life, which, however, are so eagerly courted by men. In every moment of his life—in every action which he performed, he never lost sight of the great object of his mission. The instructing men in the truth, and the devoting himself as a sacrifice for their sins, was the important business with which he was charged.

But if he acted from other motives, his conduct was altogether inconsistent and unaccountable; for then there will appear the greatest opposition betwixt the cause and the effects—betwixt the design and the means which he employed.—Was he an impostor? Why did he seek for poverty, solitude, and death? Why did he cause some of his followers to leave him, by the terrifying menaces of future evil—by the severity of his precepts, and by that degree of holiness which he required of them? Was he an enthusiast or a fanatic? This is an idea which the free-thinkers of the present time have been fond of starting. Why then did he not affect a behaviour more eccentric? Why did he submit himself, and subject those over whom he had acquired authority by the right of redemption, to the ceremonies of the law? Why did he teach doctrines which no human wisdom could have suggested, and which no person before

him had put in practice? Why had all his actions a tendency to one constant, invincible design? His whole life was a prelude to his future sufferings; but to them he did not expose himself till the very hour was arrived, in which it was determined that he was to submit to death.

In short, all these objections which the enemies of our faith have made against Christianity—objections that can serve no other purpose than to raise some doubts in their minds, and which they have employed to defend a bad cause, and discredit revelation, cannot, however, diminish that profound respect which the life and doctrine of our Saviour must naturally inspire in those who contemplate them with attention. This extraordinary person, so superior to all human calumny, when speaking of himself, boldly said, that he was the man described in the writings of the prophets, and who had been promised to the world. He assured them, that God had entrusted to him these divine truths, which he was to declare to mankind, whose redemption he was to effect. There were extant a number of books, incontestibly more ancient than Jesus, and the reign of Tiberius, all which announce a Prophet, a Saviour enriched with heavenly gifts, and promised by God to his people.

LETTER VII.

Antiquity and authenticity of the Scriptures. Truth of Christianity proved by Prophecy. The Christian Religion opposite to the inclinations and passions of human nature.

It is not, my dear child, my design to run over all the prophecies that have foretold a Messiah, a prophet, a Redeemer, who was to make satisfaction for the sins of the world, and restore the kingdom of God. I shall content myself with referring to a few places in the ancient oracles, where the coming of our Saviour is predicted in very express terms.

But I must first surmise, that the antiquity of these books, to which I allude, has never been disputed; neither are the objections of any weight which have been urged against them. Three hundred years before the birth of Christ, all these books were translated into the Greek language at Alexandria; they were then very ancient; but it is sufficient for our purpose to alledge, that Jesus frequently appeals to them as to prophecies much older than himself, and with which the world abounded. Perhaps every one does not know in what manner the religion of the Jews was spread. It appears, from the writings of a satirical poet, the cotemporary and favorite of the Em-

peror Augustus, that at Rome, which was the common rendezvous of all nations, and in particular of men of rank and fortune, many persons scrupled to violate the Sabbath-day by any kind of work or labor. All the Jews had their public seminaries, and books of their law, both in Hebrew and Greek.

To this remark we must add, that we are removed some thousands of years from the time in which the books to which I appeal were written. The manners of men, in the ages I speak of, their language, their expressions, are very different from those which prevail in the western hemisphere which we inhabit. Many things were easy and intelligible to those people who were of warm and lively imaginations, which we cannot, without great difficulty, comprehend. Custom had given a determinate sense to many of their figures, which appear to us strange and unusual. Their oral tradition served likewise as an explication to divers things, which in the infancy of the arts and sciences were but seldom written, or set down in very few words.

It is, however, incontestible, that in the early ages fallen man had the promise of a Redeemer. The sage Persians, and the Brachmans, whose writings have of late

years been studied, spoke a long time since, and with confidence, of the future appearance of a Mediator. But what renders this general opinion the more credible, is, that the most ancient of all the prophecies related to this Redeemer so universally expected; which prophecy is this—*that the seed of the woman should bruise the serpent's head*—that serpent which had seduced the mother of mankind.

When it was said to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob, that *in them should all the nations of the earth be blessed*, it is not possible to interpret this prediction in any other sense than this—that the Saviour of the world should be born of one of their descendants. We cannot, with any degree of reason, apply this prophecy to their posterity, considered in a general view; because they consisted of a people so different from the rest of the world, and with whom they had so little communication, that it is not to be presumed that so universal a blessing could be derived from them, and extend its influence over all the nations of the earth. The prophecy concerning Shiloh, which hath been the occasion of so much controversy, and of which so many explanations have been given, may, however, be elucidated from those most ancient predic-

tions, which imply that the Messiah should be born at a time, when the sceptre, departing from the house of Judah, should fall into the hands of a stranger, nor any longer be held by a person of Jewish extraction.

Moses had very expressly promised the appearance of a prophet, and indeed the only prophet, which would resemble him, more especially in this particular—*That God would reveal to him his will, which he was to communicate to men*—in this consisted the peculiar prerogative of Moses, which distinguished him from all those whom God had raised up in the midst of that nation. As it is my design to treat of these subjects with as much brevity as possible, I should be drawn into a dissertation too copious, were I to take notice of the several places in the Psalms, where the coming of some extraordinary person is promised to mankind; whom David has described in such brilliant colours that they cannot possibly be applied to a mere man.

Such was the character given by Isaiah of the future Messiah, that it cannot agree with any other person but Jesus. His entire book, though a long one, contains little else but the history of this Messiah that was to come, and of the new church of which he was to be the head. When he describes

this extraordinary gift from Heaven, which was to appear in the person of the Redeemer, he speaks of him in a kind of triumph, and with the utmost magnificence of language:—"Unto us a child is born, unto us
"a son is given, and the government shall
"be upon his shoulders; and his name shall
"be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the
"Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the
"Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his
"government and peace there shall be no
"end, upon the throne of David and upon
"his kingdom, to order it, and to establish
"it with judgment and with justice, from
"henceforth even for ever." This prophet expressly foretold the very place of his birth; declaring, that a great light was to rise in Galilee of the Gentiles, for there was Nazareth situated. He also discriminated the family of which he was to be born, and that was of Jesse the Father of David. *The voice of one crying in the wilderness*, which was a kind of an harbinger to the Messiah, was also to prepare for his coming. Mildness was to be the character of his reign; peace was to flourish upon the earth, and of his empire there was to be no end. He promised, that, in this happy age, *the wolf should dwell with the lamb, and the sucking child play on the hole of the asp*. He far-

ther speaks of him in these words: "He shall not cry, nor lift up, nor cause his voice to be heard in the street. A bruised reed shall he not break, and the smoking flax shall not be quenched: he shall seek judgment in the earth, and the isles shall wait for his law. His church shall extend as far as the earth; remote people shall be converted to him, and shall bring to an end the ungrateful nation of the Hebrews." And in order to suppress that worldly temper of the Jews, which induced them to expect a temporal monarch, a king of human race, who should reign with uncontrolled power, he has been very careful to describe, in the most pointed and expressive terms, the humble condition in which the Messiah was to appear, and the sufferings which were reserved for him; but who would afterwards be exalted to the highest state of dignity. He represented him, at the same time, as a person whose exterior form would be humble, and whose appearance would be the meanest amongst the children of men—"He shall grow before him," says Isaiah, "as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground; he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him. He is despised and rejected of men, a

“man of sorrows and acquainted with grief;
“and we hid as it were our faces from him:
“he was despised, and we esteemed him
“not. Surely he hath borne our griefs and
“carried our sorrows; yet we did esteem
“him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted.
“But he was wounded for our trans-
“gressions, he was bruised for our iniqui-
“ties: the chastisement of our peace was
“upon him, and with his stripes are we
“healed. All we like sheep have gone a-
“stray; we have turned every one to his
“own way, and the Lord hath laid on him
“the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed
“and he was afflicted, yet he opened not
“his mouth. He was taken from prison
“and from judgment; he was cut off from
“the land of the living; he made his grave
“with the wicked and with the rich in his
“death, because he had done no violence,
“neither was any deceit in his mouth.—
“Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise him;
“he hath put him to grief; when thou shalt
“make his soul an offering forsin, he shall
“see his seed, he shall prolong his days,
“and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper
“in his hand. He shall see of the travail
“of his soul, and shall be satisfied; by his
“knowledge shall my righteous servant jus-
“tify many; for he shall bear their iniqui-

“ties. Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong, because he hath poured out his soul unto death; and he was numbered with the transgressors; and he bare the sins of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.”

Almost all the prophets have predicted the destruction of the Jewish nation, and the establishment of a new kingdom, without comparison more extensive than that of Judah, and in greatness infinitely superior to it, at the time when it should be governed by the kings descended from David. The style of these predictions is in the oriental manner; and indeed could not be otherwise, to make any impression upon the minds of the inhabitants of those hot climates; where language, for many ages, even before the time of Moses, was always highly figurative, and to whom the prosaic, uniform diction of the northern people appeared insupportably frigid and disgusting.

In many other passages we discern evident traces of the promised Redeemer.—The place of his nativity is mentioned; and, notwithstanding the addition of certain circumstances extraneous to him, yet we may plainly discover a person spoken of, whose lineage would be very ancient, whose

days would be eternal, and whose coming would exterminate idolatry.

To this succeeded the famous prophecies of Daniel; which were so clear and accurate, that Porphyry, not being able to refute them, endeavored to invalidate their divine authority, by insinuating that they were written after the event had happened. The suspicions of this ancient writer, who has been too successfully followed by the free-thinkers of the present age, may, with equal propriety, be applied in opposition to what we find in the writings of this prophet concerning the kings of Syria and Egypt. All the prophecies which regard the Messiah were free from every appearance of compulsion—the book of Daniel was translated into the Greek language more than two centuries before the coming of Christ; which translation was in the hands both of the Jews and Gentiles.

Daniel, having addressed the Almighty in private prayer, that out of his abundant goodness, he would pardon the sins of his people, and rebuild Jerusalem, received in a vision this answer—"Seventy weeks are
"determined upon thy people, and upon
"thy holy city to finish the transgression,
"and to make an end of sins, and to make
"reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in

“ everlasting righteousness, and to seal up
“ the vision and prophecy, and to anoint
“ the most holy. Know, therefore, and un-
“ derstand, that from the going forth of the
“ commandment to restore and to build Je-
“ rusalem, unto the Messiah the prince
“ shall be seven weeks; and threescore
“ and two weeks the streets shall be built a-
“ gain, and the wall, even in troublesome
“ times. And after threescore and two
“ weeks shall the Messiah be cut off, but
“ not for himself: and the people of the
“ prince that shall come, shall destroy the
“ city and the sanctuary, and the end there-
“ of shall be with a flood, and unto the end
“ of the war, desolations are determined;
“ and he shall confirm the covenant with
“ many for one week and in the midst of the
“ week he shall cause the sacrifice and the
“ oblation to cease; and for the oversprea-
“ ding of abominations he shall make it de-
“ solate, even until the consummation, and
“ that determined shall be poured upon the
“ desolate.”

In another place, other events are fore-
told by this prophet; the time in which they
were to happen is precisely marked; and
it was signified to him that it was yet at
some distance, but that he who was reserved
for this person, should not enter into his rest

till the completion of these days. It was farther intimated, that the end of the world, for this is the sense of the original, was to be reckoned from the time that the daily sacrifice should be abolished, and that abomination should be introduced, which was to be the cause of the great desolation that was to follow.

I designedly omit some particular characteristics of the Messiah which are scattered in the writings of the prophets; more especially those that have a doubtful or ambiguous complexion.—I shall reduce the few materials which I have collected from the prophecies to the following observations.

In all the ancient books, on whose authenticity we may safely rely, this point of doctrine is constantly and invariably inculcated—That there would appear in the world a person of great dignity, who would bring salvation with him, and re-establish justice.

This eminent personage is described under different characters. He was to spring from the posterity of the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and from one of the descendants of David. He was to assume the prophetic office, and to perform supernatural works.

His power was not to be supported by force or violence; he was to reign by persuasion, by kindness, and benefits.

The place of his birth was fixed: and the exact time of it determined. The edict of the king of Persia was the epocha from whence this computation was to be made.

His sufferings are described in a circumstantial manner; and painted in lively and pathetic colours. His death was also positively foretold.

But that which makes the greatest impression upon my mind, are the following particulars—the grandeur and debasement which are blended in this extraordinary person, his divine origin, his meditorial office, his sufferings, the meanness of his appearance, and the duties he discharged as Redeemer of the world.—This portrait hath not its original amongst mankind; it never was conceived by the wit of any mortal being. The Jews themselves, who, in preference to the rest of mankind, were to receive the Messiah, to whom in a more particular manner he was to be a Saviour, and who were his disciples and neighbors, could not, however, be persuaded that he was the person described by the prophets. Their sordid minds could form no other idea of a prince of the royal house of David, but as a

king, the possessor of a throne, a conqueror, and victorious monarch.

The prophets, notwithstanding, had united, in the most positive and express terms, this grandeur and meanness of condition in the character which they had drawn of the Saviour of mankind.

This person, they said, is from all eternity; he will carry with him sufficient proofs that he proceeded from God alone; yet he will be born, will live in the greatest poverty, will suffer, and be put to death.

He will rise from the dead; he will reign for ever; he will shower down his blessing upon all people; he will appease the Supreme Being; he will restore to men that justice which they had lost. He will die, not for himself, but for the world; he will be bruised for their offences, he will lay down his life as an oblation for sin.

From the foundation of the world there hath appeared but one man in whom are united all these characteristics; and this was Jesus of Nazareth, born in Bethlehem, descended from David, always addressed by that name by those who had recourse to him for relief; whom the people would more than once have placed upon the throne, whose parents, in the reign of Domitian, were exposed to great danger be-

cause of their son, and who escaped death by reason of their poverty and abject condition.

This Jesus preached his doctrine without noise and tumult; he did nothing but what was good; the rectitude of his conduct was invariably the same, and never was calumniated; he was held in respect during the three first centuries after his coming into the world, in those sorrowful times when the religion which he had announced was condemned by the laws of the Pagans, mortally hated both by them and the Jews, and exposed to the cruellest assaults—when nothing prevented the enemies of the faith from making the strictest researches, to discover any fault with which they might accuse its author—in those times, when a learned sophist, at the head of the first university in the world, attacked the Christian doctrine by his writings, and employed all the artifices of the most inveterate persecutors, to exterminate it from the face of the earth—in those times, when a Celsus endeavored to load it with the foulest reproaches—when a Lucian attempted to expose the Christians to ridicule, by the keenness and severity of his satire—when the Jews anathematized and deserted them, as apostates from their religion and worship, and

exhibited against them a most inveterate animosity, which they imbibed, as it were, in their cradle—in those times so unfavorable to the Christian cause; no one, however, impeached the innocence of its divine Author—no one attacked the integrity and simplicity of his first disciples. He said of himself, and this indeed was the substance of all his discourses, and of those of his apostles, that he came into the world to suffer for the sins of men. In conformity to this design, he resigned himself into the hands of his enemies; he received, as a disciple, one who, under the semblance of friendship, betrayed him; whose perfidy and intended guilt were however perfectly known to him. His last discourses were an intercession in favor of his deluded people, and his last words were a declaration that he had accomplished his task.

By his death, the glorious promises of the prophets obtained their full accomplishment. An immense kingdom extended itself over all parts of the earth, and sprung, as it were, from his blood. The Gentiles, in great numbers, embraced the Christian faith; the profession of which notwithstanding, exposed them to almost inevitable death.—Their manners were reformed; and an universal charity was introduced into the

hearts of those who before had hated all nations except themselves. Chastity succeeded to that profligacy and impurity with which their very temples were defiled.—Freedom was given to the slaves; and the world became one family of brethren, united by similar sentiments.

This character, which was too sublime for the reason of man to imagine or conceive, was perfectly realized in Christ: in whom we may discern all those features which are so clearly marked by the ancient prophets.

He whom God only could describe by his servants, so many ages before his coming, appeared at last with true greatness—a greatness resulting from the immense benefits of the sacrifice of himself, which no man could foresee, because no man was capable of it.

The character of so divine a person, destined, however, to punishment, was never imagined by the wisest of men; and, when the original was actually seen, it was to the Jews a stumbling block, and to the Greeks foolishness.

Since the first converts among the most enlightened nations of the East judged it necessary, in pursuance of the design they had in view, to conceal from their disciples

the mean appearance of the Mediator or Redeemer whom they preached, would Isaiah, if he had been influenced by the same prudential motives, have drawn a picture which was without resemblance, either in human events, or in any ideas which had been conceived by man? Could there be found a person so impious as to assume the character of the Saviour of the world; a character of great utility to mankind, but which could not fail to bring upon him who personated it, if he would literally accomplish the prophecies, a long train of labors and sufferings, and at last a shameful death?

It is easy to be seen, from an examination of the actions of our Saviour, that no impostor could possibly, by any artifice, realize in his own person all those circumstances so particularly enumerated by the prophets; these could only be completely verified by him who was the true archetype of the picture delineated. He must be born of a certain family, and of the blood of David.—Bethlehem must be the place of his birth, and this light must first shine in Galilee. The time of his coming and his oblation had been fixed; the manner in which he must be interred was particularly described; after his death the sacrifice was to cease; the ensigns of the Romans, orna-

mented with the images of their false gods, were to be displayed in a place where they ought never to have appeared ; he was himself to live in poverty, and to shed his blood for the sins of men ; but his spiritual kingdom was to be infinite, as well in extent as duration. It was therefore requisite that the Messiah should accomplish, in his own person, all those predictions of the prophets, if he would be recognized as the person whom Israel, for so many ages, had expected.

It had been impossible for a mere human being, without the assistance of God, to have distinguished himself by all those characteristics which were necessary to appear in the Messiah. — Add to this, the time of his birth, his genealogy, the great effects produced from causes so trivial, the prodigious success which attended his ministry, though the time was so short, and the country so despised in which he was employed in teaching a doctrine that spread itself into all places and has been perpetuated through every succeeding age. There is nothing which so much distinguishes the Christian religion as its opposition to the passions and inclinations of human nature. The example of its great founder is unprecedented. Where shall we find a man who, like him, devoted his whole life to labor ;

preferred a state of poverty and contempt; exposed himself to continual dangers, without expecting any other fruit than inevitable death? It evidently appears, then, that no human address or artifice could invest a person with the distinguishing characters of the Messiah; and even if it had been in the power of any man to have assumed them, it would have been a proof of prudence and discretion to have declined the arduous task, since it could procure him nothing but sufferings and distress.

LETTER VIII.

Causes and effects of the zeal and the courage of the Apostles. Nature and force of the proof of Christianity, from Miracles. The Miracles of our Saviour, not only evidence of his Divine power, but also of his wisdom, goodness, and disinterestedness.

TO what then must we attribute the wonderful effects which followed the preaching of the gospel? Must we ascribe them to chance? Was it in the power of twelve persons, of mean condition, their minds unenlightened by science, and not conversant with the great mysteries of revelation—was it in the power of such persons to reform the world? These consequences flowed from a firm persuasion that Jesus was the person foretold by the prophets. This well grounded conviction was the only weapon that rendered them victorious in the dangers and persecutions which they encountered: It was this which placed them above the corrupt desires of human nature, the love of ourselves, and the prejudices of birth and education. The zeal which was kindled in the disciples of our Saviour communicated itself to a great number of persons who were soon inflamed with the same affections.—But what was it which produced in them this perfect conviction that Jesus was the Messiah? They had been witnesses to the pu-

city of his manners and the innocency of his life ; they perceived that his doctrine was in all respects, worthy of God ; they clearly discerned in him all the lineaments and characters of the promised Messiah ; and, in short, they had ocular demonstration of his miracles. Without having recourse to all these considerations, which are powerful motives of belief, and of themselves capable of producing conviction, let us consider that these men, who were naturally timid, whose inclinations were attached to the things of this world, who were possessed neither of great natural nor acquired abilities, would hardly have formed of themselves so great an enterprise as that of subjecting the world to a man who had been crucified. Much less would their instructions have produced such instantaneous effects, or operated so powerfully upon the minds of so many thousands of people.

Amongst the causes which wrought conviction in the minds of the apostles, I mentioned the miracles of our Saviour. It will therefore be proper, in this place, to consider the reality of them, because they afford a solid proof in support of Christianity, sufficient to produce the assent of reasonable men. And I think this discussion the more necessary, as our modern free-thinkers have

been pleased to say, that the doctrine of Jesus Christ is indeed worthy of respect; but that the miracles on which we would support it, are the only cause which prevents them from considering the author as a divine person. An uninterrupted series of events, all relating to the same object, are sufficient to persuade men accustomed to reflection, and who can trace the consequences of things. The exact resemblance which we remarked betwixt Jesus Christ and the Messiah, promised by the prophets, must unavoidably produce conviction in those who have distinctly examined their successive predictions, and compared them with the history of the life of our Saviour. But all men are not capable of making these inquiries. Those, however, who are placed in the lowest ranks of society, are as much the objects of the Almighty's paternal regard, as those who are dressed in purple, or seated on a throne, who, like the rest of mankind, are subjected to mortality. I will even venture to affirm, that a truth, proved by a long train of consequences, however well connected, will not operate, with sufficient efficacy, in the enlightened minds of those who are capable of perceiving this connection; it makes no impression on their senses; it is a *light*, but not a *fire*.

The proofs, therefore, of the divine mission of our Saviour, ought to be simple and obvious ; so that the more ignorant part of mankind may be sensible of their force—be convinced and persuaded by them, though they have not the advantage of learning, or great natural penetration.—Yet these grounds of belief must be so solid, so conformable to the spirit of the ancient prophecies, and so perfectly consonant with the known attributes of God, that they must be capable of satisfying more cultivated minds, and such as have been accustomed to reflection.

It rested with the Divine Goodness to adopt such means as might not only procure the ready acquiescence of faith, but also all due respect to him who was the minister chosen for the accomplishment of his designs.—The person deputed to perform this business, was to bring with him such infallible tokens of a divine mission, as could not be produced, but by one really sent from God. And what proof is there more effectual than the power of working miracles?—They operate immediately upon the senses. In order to feel their force, there is no need of laborious investigation, or profound knowledge. The impression they make must necessarily be the same with that which is

produced by the evidence of sense. If I see before my eyes an object that is red, I cannot be mistaken in regard to its colour ; with no less certainty am I convinced, that a human body is actually dead, after it hath been four days in the grave, and exhaled those putrid effluvia which proceed from corruption. But when this dead body, at the command of another man, rises from the grave, and is endued with the same powers of motion that it possessed before ; when, to the appearances of putrefaction succeed all the ordinary signs of life ; when the dead body walks about, speaks, and in my presence, for a considerable space of time, performs all the usual functions of vitality, every man, surely, who is not destitute of common sense, must infer, with the utmost confidence, that the dead body, by a visible though a supernatural effect of the omnipotence of God, hath been restored to life.

The proof which results from miracles is equally intelligible and convincing to all men. Who, that sees before his eyes, the presence of the Divinity in the operation of a miracle, can remain unmoved with admiration, or withhold that profound respect which is due to so powerful a Being ? This manner of persuasion is more animated than all the demonstrations of philosophy ; it in-

sinuates itself, through the *medium* of the senses, into the mind, where it begets an humble reverence of that God, who thus condescends to reveal himself to mortals. It was this divine testimony that inclined many thousands of people, unenlightened by knowledge, to proclaim Jesus their king; who, according to their ideas, was the Messiah of whom the prophets had spoken. It was this that induced the apostles to submit with cheerfulness to death; they saw the power of God displayed in him; they regarded his doctrine as the voice of God who spake to them by the miracles which Jesus wrought. They placed an absolute confidence in the promises of eternal life; and they judged them perfectly sure, because they were made by a man in whom God visibly dwelt. It is to this cause we must ascribe the conversion of St. Paul, and that ardent zeal with which he was afterwards actuated—a man well versed in all the learning of the Jews, but who had been for a long time incredulous. He travelled through all the provinces of the empire, and with an unshaken intrepidity, even in chains and in death, affirmed that Jesus was the Son of God. It was not a profound study of the prophets, or an attentive comparison of the history of Christ with the ancient pro-

phesies, that produced this change ; his conversion was the sudden effect of a miracle. These very prophets, of whom we speak, have represented miracles as a sign which would characterise the true Messiah.—“The blind,” say they, “shall see, the lame shall walk, when the doctrine of salvation shall “be announced to the miserable.” Our Saviour oftentimes appealed to these miracles as a proof that he was sent from God. “If,” says he, “you believe me, believe the works which I do.” He declared, that he should consider those men as innocent and blameless who refused their assent to the truth of his doctrine, if they had not an opportunity of seeing those works which no other man had done ; and his disciples were not afraid to declare openly to the people, and in the great assembly of the nation, that Jesus had made himself known by his miracles.

The nature of the miracles which he was to perform had been also foretold. His prodigies were not to be of that marvellous kind which would only serve to gratify vanity. He caused neither mountains nor temples to be removed from their places.—They were neither acts of severity nor punishment. His miracles were without ostentation, and benevolent in their effects ; such

as Isaiah had predicted for several ages past. Maladies, before incurable, disappeared at his command; the eyes of the blind were opened; the lame walked; children deprived of life were restored to their disconsolate parents. His disciples, when angry, breathed nothing but revenge; but he would not, at their solicitation, call down fire from heaven upon a town whose inhabitants had treated him with contempt. The Pharisees and Sadducees, who were professed enemies to every religion, experienced not the avenging power of him whom they had blasphemed. These miracles were a proof of his modesty as well as his humanity. He required no recompense for the favours he had conferred; he would scarcely permit those persons whom he had relieved from distress, to offer him the merited tribute of thanksgiving. He refused to hear himself praised by those whom he had miraculously delivered from their infirmities; and when the people were desirous to proclaim him their king, he prevented them by a speedy retreat.

I have already remarked, in the conduct of this divine person, that he was particularly careful to cause no division in the Jewish church. He did not place himself at the head of a sect; he observed the reli-

gious ceremonies which were then in use ; he assisted at their solemn festivals ; and was present at the celebration of several of the passovers. He took care to send to the chief priests a leper whom he had healed, that he might obtain permission from them, according to the law of Moses, to enter again into society, from which his former disorder had excluded him. He enveloped, with great address, his divine lessons in the obscurity of parables, that the common people, who were his auditors, might not easily penetrate into their meaning ; and he threw a shade over the brightness of those truths which he had brought from heaven to earth, at a time when they might have been the cause of much trouble and disturbance.

That wisdom, which knew the affairs of the world, and was well acquainted with times and seasons, never availed itself of these circumstances for any temporal advantage. This conduct, therefore, has prevented the enemies of revelation from starting, as an objection, that the Redeemer of mankind acted from human or interested views.

But the miracles which he wrought were fully sufficient to accomplish his designs ; they were numerous, and were infinitely superior to all the powers of man ; in them

the finger of God was evidently discovered. Many were performed in public, and before the eyes of great multitudes. Lazarus was raised from the dead, in the presence of his enemies. Jesus knew that the time of his death was approaching ; he therefore made choice of this opportunity, to give an extraordinary proof of the divinity by which he acted, notwithstanding the meanness of his appearance. For this end he purposely absented himself ; he went not to Lazarus till there were sufficient demonstrations of the total extinction of life ; not till four days had elapsed since he died—sufficient time for putrefaction in so hot a climate—that there might not be the shadow of a doubt respecting the reality of his death. When he came, he found the dead body wrapped in cloaths used at interments, and his face covered. Jesus called him in the name of God his Father ; and this voice restored Lazarus to life. He arose ; and it is generally thought, lived a long time after his resurrection : because the Jewish hierarchy had formed the horrid design of putting him to death, that he might not remain a living witness of the supernatural power of Christ. This miracle was performed in the presence of his enemies, and of many Jews who assisted at the event, and who informed the

Pharisees of the fact to which they had been eye-witnesses, and which, they confessed, exceeded the power of man. But the greatness and reality of this miraculous work was the cause of hastening the death of him who had performed it.

LETTER IX.

The Resurrection of Jesus Christ, the great evidence of the truth of the Christian Religion. An appeal constantly made to this fact by the Apostles and first Christians. The nature, necessity, and propriety of the proof of our Saviour's divine mission, by his resurrection. The conduct of his disciples inexplicable upon human views or motives. The enthusiasm of the disciples of MAHOMET, and of the martyrs of JAPAN, accounted for and compared with the heroic courage and zeal of the Christian apostles and martyrs. The true source of the holy zeal that animated the disciples of Jesus Christ.

THE Resurrection of Christ himself is another striking event, designed, in a more particular manner, to convince the world that he was the Son of God. The opposite characters of debasement and dignity were never found united in one person but in the Redeemer of the world. *Jesus of Nazareth*, during the whole course of his life, appeared in a state of humiliation; and of this humiliation his death was at once the consummation and the greatest excess. As he appeared in this humble state, so, in order to fulfil the predictions of the prophets, and to correspond exactly to the description they had given of the Messiah, it was necessary that he should appear in a state of exaltation. If he had remained in the grave, the attributes of the Divinity, which were to dwell with the Messiah, could not have been recognized in him; we

could not have discerned those prerogatives which were to distinguish him from other mortals; there would have been no resemblance in the portrait which the prophets had drawn of the Saviour who was to come.

We may remark, that in all the discourses of the apostles, addressed either to the Jewish people, to the Sanhedrim, or even to the Gentiles, the resurrection of our Saviour was the great argument used by them to demonstrate the Divinity of their Master. For the inhabitants of Athens, who were not much versed in matters of religion, imagined, after they had heard St. Paul use this proof, that the resurrection was the goddess, the worship of whom he wanted to introduce.--Christ himself often referred the incredulous Jews to the proof which his resurrection would furnish, when they required of him a sign from heaven to confirm his divine mission. Nay, farther, the promise which he had made of his resurrection was accommodated afterwards, not without some violence to their prejudices.

Every man who would establish his faith upon reasonable foundations ought to weigh this proof with attention; and I would earnestly recommend to him the consideration of it. Truth loses nothing by being closely

examined. The proof which we have adduced will serve to confirm the divinity of our Saviour. The Jewish priests had used all imaginable precaution to prevent the body of Jesus from being stolen; for they were well acquainted with the promise which he had made in such express and positive terms, that he would rise again. It is well known that the Roman discipline was very severe and exact. A detachment of soldiers of that nation were appointed to watch the door of the sepulchre where the dead body was laid, wrapped in funeral cloaths according to the custom of the Jews, with a preparation of aromatic spices, to prevent the disagreeable effects of the cadaverous effluvia. At the entrance was placed a large stone, and to this stone was affixed the seal of the magistrate. In spite of all these precautions, the dead body was gone. We can frame no other excuse for the guards than this, that they slept, and that the disciples of Jesus, attentive to every thing which passed, took that opportunity of carrying the dead body away. This apology exposed the soldiers to a severe punishment; but they were flattered with the hopes that the martial law would, in their case, be disarmed of its rigour, by the presents which should be made to those

whose duty it was to carry it into execution.

Four days after the resurrection of our Saviour, the disciples being assembled together, were summoned to appear before the Sanhedrim. They spoke also to the people in the temple. Their first and constant defence was this—That Jesus, whom they had crucified through their blindness and obstinacy, was risen from the dead. So extraordinary a miracle defeated all the designs of the Jewish council, and rendered their efforts of no avail. This defence, therefore, of the apostles, it was their interest to discredit; for, if Christ was risen, they could no longer consider his death as an event which must annihilate his new doctrines; this would rather be alledged as a convincing proof of the divinity of his mission; it would be one of the characteristics by which he would be known; and his resurrection would be another. The Messiah could not be more distinguishable than by these circumstances—that, after he had suffered for our offences, he rose again, and was raised by God to partake of his eternal glory. But the means employed by the council (who were by no means destitute of sagacity) were but badly calculated to accomplish the ends they propo-

sed ; none of their actions seemed to be dictated by common prudence. They did not publicly and solemnly accuse the apostles of propagating a falsehood ; they did not examine closely and judicially the depositions of the soldiers ; they did not invite the people to see the dead body of Jesus ; which, if risen, must have appeared with a countenance more than human ; but, if he was an impostor, must have been still in the grave. The council perceived the boldness and intrepidity of the apostles ; they saw the attachment of the people to them ; and, that the number of those who acknowledged him for the Messiah, was much greater than when he was alive, and displayed his miracles amongst them.— Their honour was at stake ; they, therefore, used every method in their power to exculpate themselves from the accusation that they had put to death an innocent man. For if they could not disprove the reality of the resurrection, it was no longer one of the common people whom they had unjustly accused, but it was the Son of God, and the Saviour of Israel, whom they had murdered.

The principal men amongst the Jews could not but see that the new converts to Christianity, whose numbers daily increa-

sed, had abandoned the religion of the murderers of a Master whom they had esteemed and honoured as a divine person; and had formed themselves into a powerful sect, who despised their dignity, and despoiled them of the privileges which they had enjoyed, and of the title they had assumed of heads and rulers of the church.

It would have been an easy matter for them to have justified themselves, if the resurrection of our Saviour had not been real. There were living witnesses to whom they might have appealed in respect to the part they bore in the transaction; as they were present, and were able to have given an accurate and unsophisticated relation of what they saw. The large stone which had been rolled to the door of the sepulchre, must have been sufficient to have secured the dead body in the place where it had been laid. There were also witnesses of the actions of Jesus then living, to whom they might have appealed for information; and, if the miracles reported of him had been false, they might easily have been detected.

None of these prudential precautions, however, were taken. The chief priests enjoined the apostles silence; this was the only means of justification adopted by the

council. But the apostles chose rather to obey God than man. They continued to preach and to affirm, that God had raised from the dead that Jesus whom they had crucified, and had taken him up into heaven.

Whence were the apostles animated with so great courage? They who had before discovered such marks of timidity as to betake themselves to a shameful flight when the enemies of their master came to apprehend him? when the most resolute amongst them, at the approach of danger, had the weakness to deny that he knew this Galilean? In this time of peril they betrayed a cowardice which can hardly be excused; they forsook that master whose miracles they had seen, whose doctrine, having for a long time heard, they esteemed as divine, and whose power, so superior to the laws of nature, they had so often admired.

After his death, his disciples would have denied him, if that death had not been followed by a resurrection. Without this last circumstance, no credit would have been given to what he had said. His disciples would no longer have cherished the hopes of a second and glorious appearance of their master. They would no longer have expected a part either of his kingdom, or

of the salvation he was to procure for his people, or of those blessings which he was to dispense. They must have been obliged, with sorrow and confusion, to confess that they had been deceived, and to return to their former occupation of fishing. Such is the conduct which they must have been determined to follow, by the common dispositions and feelings of human nature. And by this conduct they might naturally hope to escape that punishment they had reason to apprehend for conceiving the horrid design of publishing a falsehood which they perfectly knew to be such. For what could be more absurd, or contrary to common sense, than to expose one's life in order to persuade the world that a man was the son of God, whose death witnessed the contrary?—who usurped the title of Messiah, and suffered himself to be honored as such, though it must be necessarily known that he was not the promised Saviour!

The mortification alone of being so cruelly duped, must have been sufficient to have caused in the minds of the apostles, a detestation of the memory of him whom they had regarded as the Son of God—who had imposed himself on them as the promised Messiah, but who was not the person he pretended to be. They had, besides, oth-

er more urgent motives to induce them to withdraw themselves from him, or to deny that they had been his disciples. Their master was delivered up to the Jewish council without making any resistance—was reduced to the lowest state of ignominy, and suffered a shameful death. What could the disciples expect, but cruel persecutions—the hatred of those whom their master could not oppose, and, in a word, misery and misfortunes of the worst kind?—It appears, that in the whole course of their life, they sought no temporal recompense; and how could they expect it, when they persevered in their design of supporting an impostor? The secular arm was against them; and they must have been convinced in their own conscience, that they were labouring for the glory of a man, whom the world knew, and they themselves could not but confess, was not he who was promised. By what means could they have gained proselytes to a man who so little merited esteem and respect?

Certain it is, that their actions were different from the ordinary conduct of mankind; neither did they seem to be directed by those passions and inclinations which have reigned in all hearts, in all times, and in all countries.—*This Jesus, whom ye have*

crucified, is the Son of David, the anointed of the Lord, the Redeemer of Israel. This they boldly dared to assert, in the midst of priests armed with church authority—in the midst of a multitude of people who had seen Jesus expire, and who believed as a certain truth, for which they had the testimony of their own eyes, that he was only mere man. Whence proceeded that heroic firmness which never abandoned the ministers of our Saviour, and which, in the midst of a shower of stones, shone with triumphant brightness in the countenance of St. Stephen? Whence that undaunted intrepidity, which the first preachers of the gospel carried with them before the tribunal of emperors, before kings, amongst the most enlightened nations, and in all parts of the world? which spirit of fortitude they preserved, without diminution, for many years, even to the end of their ministry.

I am aware, that, in all times, men of warm temperament, and zealously attached to any favorite doctrine, have maintained it with invincible courage, and have laid down their lives in support of it, though the doctrine was, in fact, erroneous. This idea occurred to me, from considering the conduct of the followers of Mahomet; who, inflamed with zeal, have spread his doctrine

from place to place, not intimidated by the prospect of death to which they were exposed in the accomplishment of their grand design.

To these I might add the martyrs of Japan, who suffered death with great resolution, for a kind of Christianity that they professed, which, at least, amongst the greatest part of them, may be called prejudice or insatiation; because none of those numerous believers knew the scriptures, though they seemed to die in defence of a doctrine which was there taught.

This enthusiasm, I must confess, is no proof of the truth of those dogmas, for which their advocates are inspired with such ardent zeal. Though it must be allowed, that the doctrines for which the martyrs already mentioned so earnestly contended, were not unmixed with truth; and it was principally these truths which kindled that zeal which rendered so conspicuous the disciples of Mahomet, as well as the inhabitants of Japan. The former acknowledged the unity of God, in opposition to the polytheism of the heathens; and though the doctrines they received were human, they had, however, the effect of disposing them to reverence the true Saviour.

But there is an essential difference be-

twixt this kind of martyrs and those who, at the price of their blood, rendered themselves a testimony of the divinity of Christ. The Japanese suffered for a system which was taught him, but of the truth of which he had no other proof than the confidence which he placed in his instructors; who were not, however, witnesses of the facts which they maintained.—His death had not proved that Jesus Christ was crucified more than a thousand years before, in Palestine, and that he was truly the Saviour of the world. The Japanese had been only informed of these things; he had not seen them; he had not compared the writings of the prophets with those of the apostles, neither had he weighed the fact resulting from it, that Jesus was of a truth the Saviour of men. This he had been simply told, and upon no other evidence he believed it: and as it is the custom of that people never to temporize on account of any violence employed against them, this but the more confirmed him in his persuasion; because his persecutors, instead of endeavouring to convince him by argument, attempted to terrify him by menaces and punishments.

The Japanese might be a man of honour, though his faith might be erroneous.—With

respect to the apostles of our Saviour, one of these two things must be admitted; either that their testimony is true, or that they were remarkable impostors. If the miracles attributed to Jesus were not really done; if it is not true that he rose again; if, however, the apostles affirmed these two things, they must then be regarded as deceivers and false teachers, who spoke of facts which they affirm to have seen, though they were not susceptible of illusion, nor were their senses liable to be imposed upon. They declared that they had seen a dead man raised from the grave; had conversed with their master several days after he was risen; had seen him many times after he had been three days in the sepulchre; had touched him; had heard him speak; had received his orders and instructions, and were with him at the very time when he ascended into heaven. All these circumstances were subject to the examination of the senses; they could therefore judge of them with certainty. If, then, the apostles had not seen these things, or any resemblance of them, they cannot be considered as enthusiasts actuated with a good design. They were, I again repeat it, detestable impostors, who deserve the contempt of mankind for presuming to assert

as a truth what they were well convinced was false.

But to return to the question which I have already proposed.—Whence proceeded that heroic courage which stimulated men so timorous, so much attached to the present life and its advantages, to announce Jesus as the Saviour of the world; and even in the presence of his murderers, after that his death had positively decided this point so much to his disadvantage, and had seemingly removed every appearance of doubt. We can assign no other reason but this—They had actually seen him before his death perform many miracles, and after his death rise again. The power of God, which extends even to the dead, shone so conspicuously in Christ, that they could not but perceive in him all the traces of the promised Messiah. His apostles were perfectly satisfied, from the testimony of their own senses, and the conviction of their own minds, that Jesus was the Son of God. They could not, therefore, disavow it, or deny what they were well persuaded was true. This it was which made them seek death with a kind of impatience, that they might meet their benevolent master, and receive from him the recompense of their labours. Neither the hatred which they incurred, the persecution

which they suffered, nor death itself could separate them from him whom they esteemed as divine.

The frequent conversations which they had with him, after his resurrection, dissipated all their doubts, and wrought in the minds of the apostles a persuasion so perfect and entire, that Thomas addressed himself in terms which none of the rest had yet employed—*My Lord and my God!* This would have been saying too much to man, if he had not triumphed over death. But Christ suffered him to make use of this language, even praised him for it, and considered it as an instance of his faith, that he had called him not only *God*, but *his God*. This remark will serve as an answer to the inference drawn by those persons who have collected from the gospel all the passages where Jesus Christ, during the time of his humiliation, appears to be inferior to the Father.

At present there is evidently a perfect connexion in the history which the apostles have given of Christ. They announce to the world the glory and elevation of the promised Messiah, whom they had seen from the beginning, and in every stage of his life.—He was not only a teacher sent from God, but one who performed such works as were

contrary to the ordinary course of nature. These two circumstances had no other effect upon the apostles at first, than to convince them that he was the prophet which God had promised to his people. But at the time of his sufferings, and of his death, their faith was strangely staggered. "We hoped," said they, sorrowfully, that "this" "was HE who should have re-established" "the kingdom of Israel."—At this moment of fear and apprehension, Christ appeared again alive. 'This resurrection removed every doubt. They saw in him the glory of an uncreated being; they acknowledged him to be their God; they lived for him, and for him they consented to die. This conviction, which God, who had appeared to them, and whom they had seen, had operated in their minds; this irresistible conviction, I say, conduced also to the conversion of the world.

The Jews, who, by their seditious humours, had obliged the judge to pass sentence of condemnation against Jesus—those Jews, who, at the time of his death, insulted the apostles with the bitterest raileries, fell at his feet a few days afterwards, and at the feet of those men whom they had so much despised. 'They entreated the disciples to make known to them the way

of eternal life.—“ Men and brethren,” said they, “ what shall we do to be saved ?”— The important instructions they received on this occasion were not delivered from the seat of Moses ; nor by men authorised to teach, as being the successors of the prophets ; nor by a Gamaliel, highly respected and esteemed as the oracle of the people ; but by the obscure followers of Christ, who had attended him the whole time of his ministry, had learned his doctrines, and been enlightened by his divine lessons.

Here, then, is displayed the power of that conviction, which according to the promise of our Saviour, inspired a small number of laymen, whose minds had never been cultivated by education, with the most exalted fortitude. It was this which gave them so eminent a superiority over the philosophers and great personages of that age :—and at last confounded and put to silence every effort of human wisdom. This same spirit appeared afterwards, in a most remarkable manner, in St. Paul. The zeal with which he was inflamed enabled him to make some impression upon a Pagan king of a debauched and vicious life ; who, when he had heard him, and was moved by the thunder of his eloquence, ascribed it to a deprivation of reason.

It was this conviction which produced in the disciples of Jesus a contempt of death ; and, under the daily expectation of martyrdom, enabled them to contemplate their approaching end with cheerfulness and joy. This effect may be also ascribed to the long-ing hope and desire they entertained of being with Christ, whose sanctity they had seen, and whose miracles they had admired. If the greatness which they attributed to him was an imposition, or the consequence of a disordered imagination, what could be their expectations from men in dying for him ? Would not the dread of punishment have induced them to put off the mask ?— Could they, in the midst of that astonishment and repentance which now filled their troubled minds, have beheld, without fear, the preparations for a death which they justly merited, by presuming to publish false miracles, in order to impose on the world ? Yet their writings breathe nothing but constancy, resolution, and tranquillity, at the very time when they were surrounded by the horrors of death. They spoke of their departure, and of other circumstances relative to their approaching end, with a calmness and serenity of soul, not to be changed by any impending danger ; they triumphed in the midst of the severest tortures.

LETTER X.

The truth of Christianity proved by miracles. That the apostles possessed the power of working miracles, admitted by free-thinkers, and even by *Middleton* himself. The absurdity of the contrary supposition demonstrated from the epistles of the apostles to the first Christians. The reformation of religion, in these latter ages, from the errors of superstition.

IN order to strengthen the faith of the apostles, and give a sanction to these first preachers of the gospel, God enabled them to perform miracles, but in the name of Jesus. They cured diseases; and though they possessed neither silver nor gold, yet they commanded the lame to walk; and they did walk; the dead to be raised, and they were restored to life; which miraculous power has not been disputed to this day.—Even *Middleton*, who professed himself a free-thinker, and disputed the power of the church in the first ages to work miracles, hath nevertheless acknowledged it in the apostles.

St. Paul, the most active of all the apostles, has expressed his sentiments upon this subject with such simplicity, and with so great confidence in the goodness of his cause, that they appear to be a proof too evident to be wantonly attacked.—“There are,” says he, “diversities of gifts, but the same spirit. “And there are diversities of operations, “but it is the same God, which worketh all

“ in all. For to one is given by the spirit
“ the word of wisdom; to another the gifts
“ of healing; to another the working of mi-
“ racles; to another prophecy; to another
“ divers kind of tongues; to another the in-
“ terpretation of tongues. All are members
“ of the same body; so that one member
“ ought not to despise another. All these
“ gifts have their particular uses; the eye
“ and ear are both necessary organs to the
“ body; the members therefore are mutual-
“ ly serviceable to each other. Thus God
“ hath set some in the church; first, apos-
“ tles; secondly, prophets; thirdly, teach-
“ ers; after these, miracles; then gifts of
“ healing; and afterwards diversities of
“ tongues,” (this the apostle hath put in the
last place.) “ All,” added he, “ are not
“ apostles; all are not workers of miracles;
“ all do not speak with tongues; these gifts
“ are divided; but, without charity, the gift
“ of prophecy, and the knowledge of lan-
“ guages, acquired not by study, but by the
“ communication of the holy spirit, are but
“ as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal.”
“ I love rather,” says he, in his letter to the
Corinthians, “ to see you invested with the
“ gift of prophecy, than to speak in unknown
“ tongues; for a prophecy and a knowledge
“ of the secrets of the heart, produceth a

“ more certain conviction in the minds of
“ your auditors.”—The power of reasoning
was much esteemed by this holy apostle, on
account of its utility, and the effects it was
capable of producing; though he possessed,
in an eminent degree, a supernatural know-
ledge of languages. Upon this principle he
advises the Corinthians in what manner
they should employ their several gifts in
their public assemblies; he directs, that one
should give place to another, for the exer-
cise of the talent peculiar to each, in order
thereby to promote the edification of all.

We will suppose, my daughter, for a mo-
ment, with the incredulous of the age, that
miracles are things impossible to be done;
that the Christians of the first ages had no
supernatural gifts; that they performed no
miraculous cures; that the power of speak-
ing languages was a chimera, as well as that
of discerning spirits, or discovering the sen-
timents of other men; how great then must
have been the temerity as well as extrava-
gance of St. Paul, in presuming to impose
upon the Corinthians—men of ingenious,
penetrating, and irritable minds, whom the
smallest dissention would easily provoke—
a number of fabulous and ridiculous stories,
for real facts, though they all knew them to
be false, or, at least, might have fully satis-

fied themselves in this particular! Would not these Greeks, who were much addicted to raillery, have replied in some such insulting manner,—“What does this frantic prater mean by his extraordinary gifts, who has not so much as made his appearance amongst us?”

These Greeks, however, whose talent for ridicule and criticism was hereditary, read, with patience, the letter of St. Paul, and humbly submitted to his remonstrances, as to a servant of God. They excommunicated an offender upon his representation, and deprived him of all communion with them, until they were assured of his repentance; they adopted such regulations as he proposed, and bore his reproofs with submission, being perfectly persuaded that he was endued with divine gifts, and that the lessons they received from him, with respect to their conduct, were wise and prudent.

We must here remark, that the apostles of Christ did not exercise the gifts with which they were endued, in private, nor in the presence of a small number of witnesses, who might have been procured by collusion; but publicly, Peter and John healed a lame man in the temple, about the ninth hour of the day, or, according to our method of computing time, about three hours after

noon, which was the hour of public prayer, when there was a great concourse of people in the temple. Paul and Barnabas had as many witnesses when they healed a great number of persons at Iconia. It is an easy matter to work miracles among superstitious people, blinded with zeal; especially when force is employed to stop the mouth of the first spectator who doubts the reality of them: but oftentimes the presence only of another Christian, whose persuasion is different, is sufficient to stop the performance of a miracle. But, in the present case, miracles were wrought in the midst of the most inveterate enemies to the name of Christ, and under the inspection of a people who had at their disposal the secular arm, and the power of punishing; and in whom it was a point of honor to discover any defect, or even suspicion, in every miracle that was done in that name which was so odious to them.

The most learned amongst the disciples of Moses spared no pains in their researches and examinations; but it was not with the light of truth that they endeavored to expose what they judged erroneous in the doctrine of Christ. Their only expedient was to silence those by compulsion who maintained a different opinion; a conduct which betrayed an extreme littleness of mind.

These miracles were not done, as I observed before, in secret, nor near the bed of the sick person, surrounded by his family, who, in such cases, would consider every favourable change that might happen in the disease, according to its natural course, as a particular mark of the kind interposition of Providence; but they were done publicly, in the presence of thousands of witnesses: their effect was sudden and their operation instantaneous, which, in the ordinary progression of nature, would have been slow and tedious. These cures were made without the assistance of any visible means; no superstitious remedies were applied; no amulets or consecrated talismen were employed; they were performed through the invocation of that God who hath established the laws of nature, and who hath the power of suspending their action in such circumstances as his dispensations, for the benefit of mankind, may require. God, however, did not work miracles in a profuse manner, and without any design. He favored the world with those prodigies, in order to confirm or introduce some great truths which men were not disposed to receive.—Miracles were performed when Moses endeavored to select a race of people from the rest of mankind, that they might be preser-

ved in the profession and belief of a pure religion, which was repugnant to their natural inclinations.—Miracles were wrought in the times of the idolatrous kings of Israel, when the true worship began to be corrupted, and idolatry to be instituted in its room; God being desirous to preserve amongst them a knowledge of the truth, and the expectation of a Messiah that was to be born of that people. Jesus and the apostles were endued with the same supernatural power, in order to establish the true religion which had, in a manner, disappeared from the face of the earth; and to inform men that pardon for sins was not to be procured either by money, or the performance of simple ceremonies; that God required, as a necessary preliminary, purity of heart, and an entire reformation of manners; and that the expiation of sins could be made by no other means than by the satisfaction of a Mediator. God, out of compassion to mankind, hath judged these truths, on which eternity depends, important and interesting enough to deserve a display of his absolute power over nature, that he might thereby establish them. When the doctrine of Jesus had made a sufficient progress amongst men, and was deeply rooted in their minds, there was then a cessation of these miraculous

gifts, as being no longer necessary; and we have no instances, at least such as are well attested, that God, in latter times, hath conferred on any individual these supernatural talents.

God was pleased, at a subsequent period, to reform the corruptions which had crept into the Christian doctrine in the course of ages, and to bring to light those important truths which had been long forgotten; amongst which was, in particular, that sinful man could not be reconciled to God by any means, which suffered the depravity of his heart to remain unreformed. He did not establish this truth in any other way, than by enabling men to compare the ordinances and precepts of the prevailing religion with those of the immediate followers of Christ, which ought to be a rule of faith, and a model for all ages; and by placing them in a condition to oppose to the establishments then subsisting in the church, those of the primitive times, whose authors were the disciples of Jesus.

LETTER XI.

The evidence of Christianity, though not of the nature of mathematical demonstration, sufficient to convince every candid mind. Sublime representation of the Supreme Being. Divinity of Jesus Christ asserted in opposition to Socinians. Mysteries no objection to Christianity. This truth illustrated by several philosophical observations. Observations on the word Person, improperly, in the author's judgment, applied to the Deity. Necessity of a divine Mediator and Instructor.

I BELIEVE—nay, I know for a certainty, that Jesus was a just man; that he wrought miracles; and that he was really the person foretold by the ancient prophets. We find in him all those characteristics which were to distinguish the messenger sent from God. It is but a mere evasion to assert, by way of justifying our incredulity, that those truths, from whence we ought to derive our only consolation, are not mathematically demonstrated. The united testimony of so many witnesses, who were never suspected for a combination, and who never retracted what they had said; the proofs which preceded the coming of our Saviour; those which accompanied it, and those which followed, I mean the miracles of the apostles, are so many concurrent testimonies of truth, that it is impossible they should all have met exactly at the same period, and formed, as it were, a mass of evidence, for no other purpose but to give to falsehood

the appearance of truth. No man, who speaks with sincerity, will entertain any doubt of the existence, the victories, or the murder of Julius Cæsar.

If then there are proofs sufficient for us to believe that Jesus was a teacher sent from God, we must necessarily believe all that he said. If he hath neither himself deceived the world, nor been the agent of any impostor, ought we not to conclude that his word is truth? I am fully convinced, my daughter, of the absolute infinity of the Supreme Being. Though our capacities are limited, we have a certain rule whereby to judge of the greatness of God, which is circumscribed within no bounds. The universe, of itself, immeasurable in its extent, where the laws of nature are infinitely progressive, and not to be limited by human reason—this universe, in which are placed thousands of suns, more resplendent than this lower system, one of the smallest planets of which we inhabit, where are placed millions of men and animals—this universe, I say, whether we consider it in a comprehensive view, or analyze but the minutest part of it, evidently displays a wise and almighty Being, the common creator of all things. The most perfect and ingenious performances of man, will not bear a com-

parison with any of the works of God. His duration, also, will give us some faint idea of his infinite greatness. This duration is without beginning; the same to-day as yesterday. It surpasses, it is true, our comprehension; we are finite beings, and therefore our existence had a beginning; so that we cannot conceive, in our minds, a Being who hath always existed. And when we extend this idea to eternity, that is, a duration without end, it is an abyss where reason is lost and confounded. We see, however, in very intelligible characters, that God is the eternal and invariable Sun, placed as it were in the centre of this immense system, to enlighten and support it.

Men are apt to form too humiliating an idea of the great Governor of the world; they represent him too much like themselves, and confine his power to this small terrestrial spot. They have even circumscribed his protection to one nation alone, amongst the many upon the face of this earth. The knowledge I have of nature, has inspired me with other ideas of the omnipotence and greatness of God, before whom our globe is but as a grain of sand. On this account, when I speak of a man to whom the divine nature is united, I confess that this incomprehensible mystery astonishes

me. Such a thought could not of itself have entered into the mind of man, neither could he have expected to see an infinite Being united with one that was finite. No mortal could have presumed to look for such an excess of goodness on the part of an infinite and eternal Being, if this mystery, which surpasses human imagination, had not been revealed.

But he, who can neither lie nor deceive, hath expressly informed us, that Jesus of Nazareth was a man, the Son of David, born of Mary, brought up as another man; subject to the infirmities of human nature, such as hunger, thirst, grief; that he sensibly felt the weight of his sufferings, that he was even affected by the anticipation of them; and that at last he concluded the course of his life by a shameful death. In his human state he acknowledged the superior power of his father; he humbled himself before him, and even invoked his name; he represented himself as the way which was to conduct us to the father; he called himself the envoy and minister of his father; and it was through his name that he performed miracles.

We should betray the cause of truth, and act in repugnance to our own conscience, were we to assert, that we could see nothing

in Jesus but a descendant of David, and a mere man. I am often astonished at the inconsistency with which we may charge a very numerous sect who admit of revelation, and yet deny the divinity of Christ. They seem to me to act with less candor and integrity than those who reject it altogether; because, receiving as true the express testimonies which have been given of the extraordinary qualities of Jesus, they believe, upon that principle, the truths which he has established.

Christ spake of himself, in terms which evidently discovered a dignity more than human—"Before Abraham was, I am; I
"came down from heaven, where I dwelt
"with my father; I came from him; I re-
"turn to him, where I was before, and
"where he loved me from the foundation
"of the world. I am the way, the truth,
"and the life; he that believeth on me,
"hath everlasting life; the Father hath put
"all things into my hands; I will draw all
"men to me; he is in me, and I in him.—
"He who hath seen me, hath seen the Fa-
"ther; I and my father are one; all that
"is his, is mine; I will send you the Com-
"forter from my father; all men shall ap-
"pear before the throne of my glory; these
"I will receive into everlasting felicity,

“ but those shall go away into everlasting darkness. Baptize ye in the name of the Father and the son.”—He, who was far removed from all human vanity, who, in the time of his humility, would not accept of the epithet of good, because it belonged to God alone, and because he who addressed him did not acknowledge him for God—he, who had thus voluntarily humbled himself, suffered, without any reluctance, Thomas, one of his apostles, after he was convinced of the reality of his resurrection, to call him his *Lord* and his *God*. His disciples worshipped him when he ascended into heaven. And as he had said himself, that before the creation he was with God, so his beloved apostle, John, said, likewise, *that the word was with God, and the word was God.*—*Salutation, honor and glory to our God, who is seated on the throne, and to the Lamb who was put to death for the sins of the world! All things, says St. Paul, were made by him; thrones and dominions are his workmanship.*

I see no alternative; if Jesus is true, and if he came from God, he is superior both to men and angels; he, who is from all eternity, is divine, adorable, and is united to God by the most intimate connexion.

We cannot form any idea of this union of the Eternal Being with a mortal man, who,

in this state, lived about three-and thirty years;—but can we conceive, with more accuracy, the connection of the soul and body? For *we* are composed of two substances. The one thinks, perceives, judges; though it is without parts and without extension; the other, on the contrary, possesses these properties. These substances, so different, are, however, united. Every human creature is formed, in part, of gross particles of earth: but quite contrary is the essence of my soul. I perceive the shock which my body receives, and I observe that it moves at the volition of the soul. This union is incomprehensible, but it is not the less real; our own sensations confirm it daily. In like manner, there are things of a more important nature, of which we have the same imperfect ideas.

We cannot understand, for instance, the nature of motion; how it passes from one body to another; how it leaves one to agitate another, without suffering any alterations in itself, or permitting us to discern whether it is any thing extended, corporeal, or that may be measured. Therefore, of all the objections proposed by unbelievers, there are none more contemptible than those which are drawn from the difficulty of comprehending the manner in which things ex-

ist ; or that which, in the language of the schools, is termed their essence.

When God commanded the laws of nature to suspend their operation ; when he invested Jesus with a power of raising the dead, when he commissioned him to explain this great mystery—*how the sins of men could be pardoned* ; it was easy to foresee, and very reasonable to conjecture, that this divine messenger would inform us of many things, which are incomprehensible by the human mind, and which no language could clearly express or develope. When he talks of the properties and attributes of the Supreme Being, is there not as much cause for astonishment, as if he had spoken of things incomprehensible ?

We find, however, no contradiction in these mysteries ; and though we cannot understand their manner, yet it is not impossible for us to see the fitness of the means for accomplishing the ends designed. In this point we cannot be deceived.

God hath joined the soul to the body, the divine to the human nature ; a being indivisible, simple, immeasurable, without extent, without any corporeal property, to a body infinitely inferior to it : this is a truth of which we are absolutely convinced.— Though a disquisition of this nature falls

not within my present design, yet I have used the consideration only by way of example.

'That a Being, incorporeal and indivisible, governs the world; and that all motion is derived from him, though the operation is invisible, are truths universally believed: Why then may he not act upon spirits immaterial and indivisible like himself? Why is it impossible that the Divine Attributes, such as wisdom, goodness, justice, the power of working miracles, should be intimately united with a created spirit, and displayed in him, though after a particular manner?

I am no theologian, and therefore do not employ those terms of art which have been invented by the disputants on the incarnation of our Saviour, and the union of God with Christ. I must, however, remark, that the word *person* is improperly used; since it implies, as every one knows, a thing different from every other thing, which thinks, wills, and acts for itself only. Now we cannot suppose any such distinction in the Divinity. I think, however, that the words of our Saviour himself oblige me to believe, and with a full acquiescence of faith, that Jesus was not a simple man, nor even a mere angelic being; but that the Author and Creator of all things hath united him-

self, in an incomprehensible manner, to beings which are not pure spirits, to the human soul of Christ, that in this soul were visibly manifested divine qualities and perfections: and that this union of the Divine with human nature was in Jesus so intimate and perfect, that he both thought and acted as God thinks and acts—and that it was with justice, therefore, that Divine honors were paid him, and that he was called God.

This mystery appears to me the less strange, as I clearly discern the reasons which induced the Supreme Being, who is infinitely merciful, to unite the Divine and the human nature.

When we say that the Divinity, which so infinitely surpasses our conceptions, departs, on certain occasions, from the ordinary method of governing the universe; that it had wrought miracles; that, out of many millions of human souls, it selected one in order to be joined with it; I can conceive that some great advantages must result from such an extraordinary and unexampled effusion of grace and beneficence; and that the wisdom of God hath not adopted this plan without having some important ends in view.

It was necessary that the person chosen to execute this scheme should be of eminent

dignity, since he was to come into the world to reveal the truth—to persuade men of the certainty of another life, and a future judgment—to establish such a system of morality as might sanctify us, render us acceptable to God, reform the human heart, incline us to despise the things of this world, or at least to hold them in no greater estimation than they deserve. Experience hath often demonstrated, and indeed the nature of things will not permit it to be otherwise, that a man subject to error and to sin, is not a fit instrument to succeed in an enterprise of this kind. He who is polluted with vice deprives himself of all that authority and respect which is necessary to command the minds of others, and subjugate the human passions. He who is obnoxious to error may be mistaken in his endeavors to distinguish good from evil; he may err in his judgment of what is true and what is false, and may therefore ground his precepts on wrong principles; he may exact from those he instructs too much or too little. A slave to his senses, and to whatever flatters them, can he hope that his doctrine will gain much credit, when he recommends the pursuit of those things which are above, rather than these which are on earth?—those which are eternal, rather than these which

are but temporal; the preference of futurity to the present moment? Or, when he describes the purposes and attributes of God, will his discourses be much attended to? He might reason, I confess, and draw such inferences as reason would approve of; but his pieces would be imperfect, and his systems deficient in the most essential part: upon so weak a foundation he would not establish a religion capable of influencing our practice, or directing our conduct.

It was not enough that Socrates professed so pure a morality; or that the eloquent Epictetus possessed all those talents which distinguished the Greeks from other nations. Those imperfections which are inseparable from human nature; the defects which we discover in Marcus Aurelius and in Socrates, whom we have already mentioned—the virtue of the former being principally calculated to shine upon the stage, and the mind of the other not being exempt from a propensity to voluptuous pleasures—these circumstances could not fail to deprive their doctrine of that ascendancy which it ought to have had over the hearts of men. Epictetus was but a feeble light in the midst of a few friends; he could not, like the sun, illuminate whole nations, cause the seeds of virtue to germinate, or infuse into them

a vivifying principle. — Confusius also wanted a greater degree of fervency ; his doctrine was capable of rendering the people obedient to the laws of emperors, but not to those of God ; it might make them citizens, but not truly pious ; it might give to its disciples the appearance of virtue or wisdom, but could not render them really good.

To Jesus was committed the charge of reforming mankind, of impressing sentiments of duty upon whole nations, and of rendering those impressions permanent, in order to their attainment of eternal happiness. — This commission he hath executed ; neither was any other person qualified for so important an office. For eighteen centuries we have reaped the fruits of his coming into the world ; our notions of the Deity are more perfect than were those of the heathens ; we know what we ought to do to please him ; we have the firm assurance of a future life, and have received a system of morality pure and complete.

To accomplish this grand design, it was necessary that the Mediator should be exempt from evil, nor should even be accused of any ; that he should have a perfect knowledge of the Divine Being, and of eternity ; and that in all difficult cases

which might arise in the exercise of his important commission, a wisdom free from error, and incapable of being deceived, should dictate to him how he should speak, and should so direct him in all his actions, that he should neither fear the ingenious malice of men, nor the sarcastical sophisms of a Julian; but should be able to defeat all the efforts of Jewish obstinacy, nor should be in the least affected with the satirical reflections of incredulous men. The power of working miracles, which was either to be exercised or suspended according as circumstances offered, ought not, by an effect of vanity so inseparable from the human heart, to be displayed, on the one hand, with too much pomp, or, on the other, with any appearance of ambiguity, that the Jews might have no room to discover that malevolence so inherent in their nation. Such a Mediator must not be liable to any surprize of the senses; no criminal pleasure, no passion of whatever kind, must tarnish the purity of his conduct; he must be void of every inclination to anger; neither must the fear of death allay his zeal, or weaken his efforts to accomplish the glorious ends for which he was to come into the world.

In a word, such a Redeemer must be more than mere man; because a man is al-

ways exposed to error and to vice. But the Divinity with which Jesus was invested rendered his wisdom complete; banished every passion; directed his miraculous powers; spoke through him in a manner not to be imitated by all the eloquence of man; conducted him constantly in a right course of action, without deviating from the great design which was the object of his heavenly mission. This Jesus, who from the beginning had been with God, who was come from God, was alone capable of revealing his counsels to men. He to whom the Father had committed all judgment, could alone inform men what the Divine Justice had prepared against the workers of iniquity. This union of God with Christ was doubtless a mark of goodness worthy of our admiration, without which the coming of Jesus into the world had been of no effect.

LETTER XII.

That Jesus Christ was a sacrifice for the satisfaction of Divine Justice, proved from the writings of the prophets; from those of the Apostles; and from the declaration of our Saviour himself. Inconsistency of those who admit the Divine inspiration of the Scriptures, yet deny the doctrine of the satisfaction made for sin by Jesus Christ.

THE embassy of Jesus Christ had other objects in view, more important still, if that be possible, than what we have already mentioned; for the attainment of which it was not sufficient that he should be a mere man.

The design he had formed was not only to instruct men in the truth, but principally to reconcile them to God. I have said, in a preceding letter, that the means of this reconciliation was a mystery which mankind have endeavored in vain to discover; which the greatest sages have examined with much eagerness and assiduity, but which it has been impossible for man to unravel.

All nations have had some confused ideas of it, some faint representation, which they had derived from a tradition that had been handed down from the first of men. They thought that atonement might be made for sin by sacrifice, or by shedding the blood of

some animal. Moses, who was commissioned by God to institute a ceremonial worship, as being best adapted to the genius of the people amongst whom he established it, because they were not susceptible of other impressions than those of the senses, retained and sanctified these sacrifices. But it was easy to perceive--God having very intelligibly explained himself upon this subject--that the blood of animals could not effect a reconciliation with him; and that the sins which reigned in the corrupt hearts of men were not to be obliterated by such kind of fines or ransoms. The design of these ceremonies was only to remind them of their subjection and dependence on that Sovereign Being who was the dispenser of all temporal blessings--to inform them that they were sinners, and that they could expect the pardon of their sins from his grace alone.

In the mean time the means of reconciliation had been revealed by God, and that upon an early and important occasion, when fallen man, conscious of guilt, stood trembling in the presence of his offended Maker. We find some outlines of these means in the Psalms, which speak of a suffering Saviour; and those Psalms were more ancient than Homer. But Isaiah, who lived before the

time of Confucius, the philosopher of China, hath clearly unfolded this mystery. I will not repeat the texts which have been already quoted, I will only cite a remarkable passage of this most eloquent of the prophets—"He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities."

"He is come who must execute all the promises of God; he forewarned his disciples that he must suffer, but that his sufferings would be to their advantage; and that he should voluntarily lay down his life.* He died for men, and gave his soul a ransom for many. He ordered his disciples to solemnize the remembrance of his death, which was to be observed in after ages, by the symbols of bread and wine; the former, being broken, was to represent his body offered to God for the salvation of men; and that the latter was to signify, that his blood was shed for the pardon of sins.† He declared before his death, that to drink his blood and to eat his flesh, were the indispensable means of obtaining remission of sins.‡ He said,

* Matt. xxii. 28. John v. 18.

† Matt. xxvi. 16. 27.

‡ Mark xiv. 22. et seq. Luke xxii. 11. 19. et seq. 1 Cor. xi. 24.

“ that he should lay down his life for his
 “ sheep.* That greater love hath no man
 “ than this, that a man lay down his life for
 “ his friends; that is, for those who keep
 “ his commandments.† That God so lov-
 “ ed the world, that he gave his only begot-
 “ ten Son, that whosoever believeth in him
 “ should not perish, but have everlasting
 “ life.”‡

After his resurrection, he said to his disciples—“ Ought not Christ,” (i. e. according to the ancient prophecies) “ to have
 “ suffered these things, and to enter into
 “ his glory.”§ It is this point of doctrine that Philip the apostle explained to the chamberlain of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians.||

The disciples of our Saviour were more explicit upon the sufferings of their Divine Master, and upon the happy consequences of them. John says,** “ And he is the pro-
 “ pitiation for our sins; and not for our sins
 “ only, but also for the sins of the whole
 “ world—He saw the Lamb which was
 “ slain, and hath redeemed us to God by his

* John x. 15.

† John xv. 13.

‡ John iii. 16.

§ Luke xxiv. 26.

|| Acts viii. 30.

** 1 Epist. ii. 2.

“ blood, out of every kindred, and tongue,
“ and people, and nation.*—Peter adored
“ the Deliverer, who hath borne our sins in
“ his body upon the cross, that we being
“ dead unto sin might live unto righteousness;
“ by whose wounds we are healed.”

St. Paul, whose zeal much contributed to the progress of the gospel, describes, in a particular manner, the advantages of this doctrine. “ Being justified freely by his
“ grace, through the redemption that is in
“ Jesus Christ, whom God hath set forth to
“ be a propitiation, through faith in his
“ blood, to declare his righteousness for the
“ remission of sins.” In another place he says, “ But God commendeth his love to-
“ wards us, in that, while we were yet sin-
“ ners, Christ died for us. For if, when we
“ were enemies, we were reconciled to God
“ by the death of his Son, much more being
“ reconciled, we shall be saved by his life.
“ He was delivered for our offences, and
“ was raised again for our justification.—
“ Christ died for us, according to the Scrip-
“ tures.—One hath died for us, to the end
“ that we might all live for him who died,
“ and is raised again, for us.—God hath been
“ reconciled to us in Jesus.—He, who knew

* Apoc. v. 9.

“ no sin, was made sin for us, that we might
“ be made the righteousness of God in him.
“ Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of
“ the law, being made a curse for us; for it
“ is written—*Cursed is every one that hang-*
“ *eth on a tree.*—In him, and by his blood,
“ we have the redemption and pardon of
“ sins—Christ hath so loved us, as to give
“ himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice
“ to God, for a sweet-smelling savour. He
“ gave himself a ransom for all, that he
“ might redeem us from all iniquity.”

These texts may serve as a foundation to a great number of others, in all which there is a frequent repetition of this great truth—
“ This is life eternal, that they might know
“ the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom
“ thou hast sent.”*—“ That there is no
“ other name under heaven, which hath
“ been given to men, by which they can be
“ saved.”

I would, therefore, my dear child, recommend to you, as a thing very necessary to read, without any prejudice, these expressions which I have extracted from the sacred writings; and to consider what is their proper and literal sense. We are not yet arrived to so great a pitch of infidelity as

* John xvii. 3.

to deny the existence of a God ; every work of creation loudly confutes this hypothesis : but there are many who cannot digest the doctrine of a Saviour suffering for mankind, the merits of whose death are imputed to them ; they love rather to distort the meaning of scripture, and to explain it contrary to the rules of sound criticism ; they had rather reject the whole, than agree to the opinion that man stood in need of a ransom. We should have less reason to expostulate with these men than with the atheists, if it was not proved that the doctrines revealed are the word of God and of truth. But to acknowledge the divine origin of the Christian religion, and refuse to believe that Jesus died for us, and that he hath reconciled us to God, is an inexcusable contradiction, as well of itself, as of the truth which is admitted. It was not possible to express in terms more clear than revelation hath expressed them, these important doctrines—That men, by their sins, had forfeited the favor of God ; but that God, out of his infinite love, had promised them, by his prophets, that he would send his only Son into the world ; that he accordingly came at the appointed time, and, in conformity to the prophecies, suffered and was put to death ; that his sufferings have satisfied the Divine

justice ; that he hath purchased the pardon of sins to all those who believe in him, and hath rendered them capable of inheriting eternal life ; and, lastly, that there is no other way to appease the justice of God, than by faith in his Son. I have here only described this doctrine as we find it in the Scriptures ; I have not yet attempted to prove the truth of it.—I have observed, and with concern, that Christians, when speaking of these matters, have often employed very unbecoming expressions, such as, *God is born, God is dead* ; they seem, indeed, justifiable ; but, at first sight, convey to the mind an idea at which it revolts ; because the Supreme Being is necessarily eternal and infinite, never ceased to be, and therefore was not born in time ; much less could he be subject to sufferings, to sorrow, or to death. Jesus, indeed, hath suffered ; he hath endured inexpressible sorrows ; his will, though absolutely resigned to that of his Father, could not, however, withstand the feelings of human nature, insomuch that he prayed to his Father that the bitter cup might pass from him. The extreme anguish of his soul caused drops of blood to fall from his eyes ; and so much was he depressed, that he had required the consolations of an angel. None but created beings are sus-

ceptible of pain; but we apply the common modes of speech to objects of an incorporeal nature, without perceiving the abuse of them. No man who knows God, that is, who has suitable ideas of his nature, will assert that he has suffered.

But this is not the only difficulty. Modern philosophers will not acknowledge that mankind could be so corrupt as to excite in the Deity any desire of punishing them.—They will not allow, that one being could be condemned to suffer for another; or that the righteousness of a just man could be of any avail to a sinner. But they do not consider that the Divine justice required a sacrifice which was necessary to effect a reconciliation with God. This denial of the necessity of the merits of Christ's sufferings is an opinion very prevalent at present, and which threatens the total ruin of Christianity. For to give up this essential doctrine of the necessity of a satisfaction, what is it but to renounce our faith in Jesus Christ, who died for our sins, and rose again for our justification? At present, I am arguing with such persons as believe in divine revelation. As to those who do not, I have already, if I am not mistaken, evinced, that the Scriptures are indeed the word of God, by proofs and arguments sufficient

to impress every unprejudiced and candid mind with the fullest conviction. With regard to those who are persuaded that the Scriptures are the word of God, I flatter myself that it will be no difficult matter to bring the question in dispute to a short issue.—The scripture is true—the sufferings of Christ, or the merits which we ascribe to them, are so clearly taught, that they appear to be the grand design, or the very spirit, as it were, of this scheme of redemption; which truth, if you admit, you must then acknowledge the merit of the sufferings or the death of Christ. They certainly do not act with candour and sincerity who attack some certain truth which forms a part of a body of doctrine that we admit to be true and unexceptionable. Can we esteem the integrity of those, who having embraced, as holy and divine, a complete system of doctrine, permit themselves afterwards to reject openly or secretly, the most essential parts, as contrary to sound reason?

Truth fears not the severest examination. I will, therefore, offer those reasons which induced me to consider the scheme of redemption, not only as a revealed truth, but as a reasonable doctrine, and consonant to the ideas which I have of the justice and goodness of God.

I will not, however, go so far as to say, that this manner of punishing and of pardoning was the only possible way which God, in his infinite wisdom, could adopt. God is Lord of many thousand worlds, which, reasoning from analogy, may be inhabited by other thinking beings. We know that there are beings superior to man, amongst whom sin hath introduced itself; and that this superior order of intelligences is employed by God as his instruments in the government of the world. In what manner does he there punish faults? Or how does he reclaim delinquents if they offend? Here I have not even a conjecture to offer.—The only example we have in scripture of the punishment of angels, gives us room to conclude, that God hath employed quite different means, in order to demonstrate the hatred which he hath to evil. We are there informed, that those superior beings, actuated by malice and envy, revolted against God, and were therefore punished with great severity. It is sufficient for us to know what is our duty towards God, and what is his manner of proceeding in regard to us.

LETTER XIII.

Depravity of human nature. Divine wisdom and goodness in recovering mankind from a state of sin and misery. Of the duration of that punishment which follows vice, as its natural or judicial consequence in any order of intelligent beings. The conduct of Divine Grace justified in the eye of reason. General sketch of the Christian religion. Its suitableness to the condition of sinful and wretched men. Its visible effects on the least cultivated minds; and in the lower ranks of life. Desperate folly of rejecting a revelation from God, because we cannot raise our minds to a conception of all the Divine ideas, nor comprehend every part of the plan of redemption.

THE object which I have had in view, in the preceding part of this work, and that to which I have confined myself, has been to shew that human nature is in a state of the deepest depravity and corruption; that God cannot look upon sin but with abhorrence and indignation; that he regards it as an object utterly unworthy of his countenance and favor; that he considers vice as a thing which is subversive of the good order of the world; that it became the righteous Governor of the universe to stigmatize and to punish it by certain visible marks of his displeasure: but that, on the other hand, virtue is to the Supreme Being an object of complacency and delight.— These things, then, I shall take for granted; nor shall I add or repeat any thing in order to support their truth or justice.

An universal degeneracy had overspread the world; that reverence and worship which dependent creatures owe to the Author and Preserver of their being, had vanished from hearts enslaved by every guilty passion and impure desire. Eternity was forgotten: the threatening aspect of this dreadful object no longer disturbed the repose of mortals; every action of man was an infringement of the laws of God. And though the sins of men could not disturb the felicity of the Divine Nature, which is infinitely above the reach of human malignity; yet they were a direct violation of the Divine laws—laws founded in the very nature of things, and which fix the merit or demerit of every action and every thought with unerring justice.

The greatest part of mankind were reduced to such a state, that the purity and holiness of God could not but disapprove their actions, and render them undeserving the Divine favour.—Had it been better for God to have abandoned them entirely to the evil consequences of their vicious inclinations, and totally have withdrawn his patronage? The Divine Goodness judged otherwise; he made a trial of this desolate and abandoned condition in beings of a superior order—in intelligences more perfect; who,

though immaterial, and therefore not dependent on the body, or subject to the senses, withdrew their obedience from him, though they were not under any invincible necessity of yielding to temptation.

God had a paternal tenderness for man ; but how was he to deliver him ? To suffer so great depravity to remain unpunished, would have been acting in repugnance to the Divine Nature, to which the love of good is essential, and, on the contrary, the disapprobation of evil. But the indignation of God is hell : and if he had permitted a guilty world to continue in the commission of crimes ; if he had abandoned sinful men here below, and to all eternity, to this miserable condition, without discovering his hatred of sin, he had been no longer Judge of the world : his reasonable creatures would have had no recompense to hope for, from their attachment to virtue ; and no punishment to fear from their indulgence in vice ; they would have lost all respect for that justice which is essential to his nature, nor have submitted to those laws whose violation was attended with no prejudice. All order would have been confounded ; and the natural connexion that there is betwixt the good actions of intelligent beings and happiness, betwixt their bad ones and unhappiness, would have been dissolved.

But do men always become better by chastisements? Do these compel them to be good? Let us reflect on the condition of the fallen angels; we have no reason to think that their punishment, the natural effect of their malice, hath wrought any change in their tempers. And when we take a view of those men who have groaned under the weight of God's displeasure, we shall find that his chastisements have seldom made any durable impressions, or produced any reformation of the will: and if we extend our researches to Christians, who enjoy the comfortable hope of a Deliverer, we may observe that malefactors, during their captivity, have very rarely made atonement for the crimes which they had committed against society, but have rather been the more confirmed in their wickedness: despair has often increased their malice.—Sickness, accompanied with pious exhortations, have sometimes produced virtuous resolutions; but they have vanished as soon as the patient has been restored to his health.

Punishments, it has been said, ought not to be eternal; because they must tend to the reformation of men. But will the punishments of a limited time, as a few years for instance, or even for ages, produce in man an eternal obedience; since, in com-

parison of eternity, any duration which we may assign to these pains, will be but infinitely short? Would that impatience, that murmuring, that restlessness under the judgments of God, which these limited sufferings produce, be removed by new afflictions? and, from this mode of reasoning, would there not be required a prolongation of chastisements? The knowledge which we have of the human heart will not permit us to hope that, through the means of punishment, vice will be changed into virtue. And God, who perfectly knows us, knows also that this limited punishment must in the end terminate in that which is eternal.

In answer to this it hath been said—May not the grace of God act immediately upon the depraved and uninformed mind, to enlighten and to sanctify it; to inspire it with wisdom and virtue, and transform it into a new creature? But, according to this opinion, no satisfaction will be made to the Divine justice. Intelligent beings, after having transgressed the laws of their sovereign Master, would obtain the greatest rewards without feeling the least effect of the indignation of God, or, in other words, of his abhorrence of evil. Besides, the inseparable connection which there is betwixt bad actions and the natural consequences of the

disapprobation of God, would be broken.—God treats us as reasonable beings, endowed with the liberty of acting: his grace furnishes us with means which are compatible with this free will; as, exhortations, counsels, and powerful incentives; but, at the same time, hath left us the power of resistance. Without this liberty we should be absurd and contradictory beings, having the faculty of reasoning, but controuled by the influence of some exterior agent, which would impose as unavoidable a restraint upon our wills, as if we were wholly destitute of the exalted faculties of liberty and understanding. Our actions would not be our own; besides, there must be this alternative—either man would be a mere machine, wholly directed by some supernatural impressions, without the power of acting; or else there would remain in the hearts of men, even those improved by grace, a number of imperfections which could not render us acceptable to God, or exempt us from punishment. The Deity does not act like the kings of the earth, who pardon many errors, and even crimes—who can esteem subjects which are useful to them; whom they can also recompense, though, in some respects, they are reprehensible; because they perceive that there is no person, how-

ever capable of serving and pleasing them, that is absolutely exempt from faults.— They raise to honor and preferment those in whom good qualities predominate over bad, and who have faithfully acquitted themselves of the employments in which they were entrusted. In God, all is order, and that in the greatest perfection: his weights and his measures are therefore perfect. No evil thought that enters into the heart of man—no criminal desire can there meet with indulgence. In proportion to their turpitude, God will regard them with disapprobation and abhorrence. He weighs all transgressions in the scale of equity; he enters them in the books, which will be opened at the great day of accounts: and if they are inscribed in the register of human iniquities, they will also be found in the book of punishments, which are destined to every man according to his works. The best of men, by reason of their imperfections, will be, by turns, the objects of God's favor and displeasure—will be alternately obnoxious to punishment, and in a condition which will entitle them to reward.

In the times in which we live I may be thought, perhaps, too severe; but I speak from the authority of scripture. Man, in this life, cannot attain to perfect virtue, even

though God should condescend to direct him by his grace. The justice of mortals is far from being immaculate; this imperfection may, perhaps, be a preservative from greater evil. Many of the sins to which we are subject remain buried with us in the grave. The love of voluptuousness follows us not to eternity, any more than avarice. The first of these vices has no means of gratification when the soul is separated from the body, which was so necessary to the enjoyment of this kind of satisfaction; the other will be deprived of its object in a place where the metal it was so fond of amassing will not be found.—But there is another vice much more odious, which hath a powerful influence over the soul, and which may follow it into the world of spirits. This vice infected the seraphims, and was productive of much vexation in the habitations of the just. The vice I mean is pride. Human virtue, imperfect as it is, is often tarnished with this fault—a fault more odious to God than any other, and which may even render us unhappy in heaven itself. Pride is that internal satisfaction, or that complacency, with which we consider our own perfections. It presumes to call God to an account, and prevents us from acknowledging our obligations to him.

We may observe in the works of *Seneca*, the pride with which the men of that age, because of some virtues that rendered them beneficial to their country, exalted themselves above the Divine Nature: and even amongst true Christians, in that church which calls itself the reformed, this vice hath blended itself with their virtues.

Are not the imperfections of men the most effectual, though, at the same time, the most mortifying means of repressing this pride? God would not remove from St. Paul every moral defect, though this apostle so often requested it by earnest prayer: it was necessary for him to be imperfect, that he might perceive how much he stood in need of grace. It is, indeed, impossible that man should of himself attain to a degree of rectitude absolutely free from fault. And God, perhaps, may design by this to cherish in the hearts of men sentiments of humility. This faultless perfection will never be confirmed by the seal of God, till they have been justified at the great judgment, and shall enjoy the ineffable light of God's presence, before whom there is no darkness.

The sufferings of a Mediator was another of the means chosen by God of reconciling us to himself: this should likewise create

in us an humble disposition. God was inclined to save mankind, not from the righteousness of man himself, or from any merit of his own, but only through the redemption which is in Christ. It is by faith that he is justified, and not by the accomplishment of the law. This is the invariable doctrine of revelation, as preached both by St. Paul and by our Saviour himself.—“Without me ye can do nothing.—This is life eternal, that they believe in him whom God hath sent. Man, justified by the grace which is in another, hath no cause for pride or vanity.”

The plan of redemption adopted by God is perfectly consonant to the inclinations most prevalent in the heart of man. It operates both on his hopes and fears; without hope, malice would carry itself to the last extremities; without fear, the passions would know no bounds. Fear is excited by the severity with which the Mediator of men hath felt the effects of the hatred that God hath for sin. It has been already mentioned, and I take this opportunity of repeating it—that Jesus, in the last hours of his life—in that dreadful night which he passed in the Mount of Olives—sunk under the weight of the indignation which God hath to sin; his soul was sorrowful even unto death; in

the midst of the pains which he suffered upon the cross, he complained that God had forsaken him. What then must be those sufferings which could make such an impression upon a soul like our Saviour's; who, knowing beforehand all that he must suffer, did not voluntarily expose himself to it?

These terrible effects of the hatred of God to sin, must justify the Divine purity in the eyes of all intelligent beings; they sufficiently prove the abhorrence of the just Judge of the universe, of evil, and that he could not pardon the sinner without chastisement. This proceeding was likewise necessary to reconcile the rights of justice with those of mercy—that the one might be satisfied without prejudice to the other. The minds of men must be seized with a rational fear, when they perceive that the punishment of their faults was inevitable, and that it fell with so great violence upon him who had devoted himself a sacrifice for them—who, though fortified by the divinity that was within him, felt nevertheless, so great inquietude for the sins of others. Must they not tremble to fall into the hands of the living God, who, in respect to sin, is a fire which devours and consumes, and who spared not the sins of men in the person of his beloved Son?

And indeed, since the reconciliation which hath been established between God and sinful man, the impression that the sufferings of our Saviour must naturally make on our minds, continues to display the efficacy of them. But yet, without faith and obedience, we cannot enjoy that pardon which is the fruit of the satisfaction made to the justice of God. When we are remiss in the performance of these conditions—when we neglect to appropriate to ourselves the promised pardon, by an active and operating faith ; when, by a fresh revolt, we act in opposition to those eternal laws which not only prohibit vice, but which require the practice of virtue, we lose all pretensions to the redemption which Jesus hath acquired for us, and we again incur the indignation of God, whose severity is so apparent in the sufferings of Christ.

But the effect of this fear is rendered still more efficacious by the hopes which the same object creates in our soul ; God is appeased ; he considers sin as blotted out ; his grace displays in us those happy influences which all those experience who do not voluntarily reject them. The Saviour himself, who hath discharged our debt, and paid our ransom, promises us his assistance. He is gone up into heaven, where he has

prepared mansions for those that follow him. The designs of God towards us have been revealed; the way which will conduct us to happiness is known; conditions have been proposed, and the means of conforming ourselves to the ordinances of God have been communicated. This is that conformity which will render us acceptable to him; and his favor is true happiness.

We know the importance of eternity; we are well convinced, from the indubitable testimony of him who hath been sent to us from the eternity where he dwelt, that we are called to life everlasting; and that unchangeable happiness will be the rewards of those who are faithful in this short space of probation.

We are not ignorant of the strict justice of God, from the sorrowful instance of our Mediator who suffered for us; the condition of men who displease him will be miserable, as it will be glorious to those who are objects of his grace; this is a truth which no reasonable man will doubt. Two ways are open before us; the one, though mortifying to our senses, will nevertheless become more agreeable through his grace, and will in the end conduct to unalterable felicity:—the other, though it may gratify our inclinations for a short time, will at last plunge

us into an abyss of endless wretchedness. There are no persons so well instructed in the motives for an holy life as the professors of Christianity. They are perfectly known even to persons of a common understanding; and in comparison of the certainty of their persuasion, the conjectures and reasonings of the ancient philosophers were like shadows which were too transient and inefficacious to make any impressions. Every Christian can consult the Oracles of revelation, and by the favor of this divine light, can penetrate into those mysteries which were unknown to the world before the coming of the Mediator sent by God. Amongst the most illiterate, those who are constantly occupied by manual labor in providing for their daily wants: we may, nevertheless, discover some sentiments of religion, not unmixed with zeal; and also a contentment both in life and in death, which is unknown to those whose hearts are not illuminated by the light of the doctrine of Christ.

This world is only a place of trial, where the weakness of man is strengthened by the power of grace communicated by God. Before the coming of our Saviour, men were bewildered in error; were led astray by the violence of their passions, and wandered

about like lost sheep. But when the great shepherd appeared, he called together the scattered flock—he went before them, and conducted them into the way which leads to heaven : his country is ours ; he has paid for us those debts which we were not able to discharge ; we are born again ; the re-establishment of our primitive innocence begins with this new life.

The justice of God is satisfied by the sufferings of our Redeemer ; grace hath established its empire over man, who is now reconciled. These, according to my ideas, are the great motives which have engaged the Master and Judge of the universe to give us a Redeemer, to the end that he might make our peace by his sufferings. I may possibly be mistaken in some of my conjectures ; it is very difficult for mortals to judge rightly of divine things ; these are, however, incontestible truths, that it hath pleased God to send into the world, at the time appointed, the Mediator which he had promised and announced by the prophets ; to whom the divinity was united in an incomprehensible manner ; and who, during the time he sojourned upon earth, not only instructed men in the truth. but also communicated the charitable designs of God concerning our salvation—that his justice hath

been satisfied by the voluntary sufferings of the Saviour ; and that he hath opened a way to the throne of grace, where we may be received as unpolluted beings.

This is a short view of revelation. From what has been said, it is easy to perceive that it was necessary for us to have for a mediator, or for a propitiator, (for so the scripture calls him,) some person who was holy, innocent and without fault. A sinful man might have suffered for himself only ; though I see no reason to believe that his sufferings would have been sufficient even for himself . but it is without a doubt, that they could have made atonement for the sins of another, because he would himself have been an object of the indignation of God ; there would have been wanting some other means, foreign to himself, to have procured his own pardon.

But the wisdom and goodness of God hath executed what was beyond the abilities of man. The Divinity, which dwelt in the person of the Mediator, hath highly exalted him ; the succours which it afforded rendered him absolutely just and incapable of sin ; the voluntary sacrifice which he hath offered for the sins of the world was free from all blemish, and hath been accepted by the perfect justice of God ; who in the

person of him whose innocence was immaculate, hath fully discovered what are the wages of sin, and that his eyes are too pure to behold iniquity. Without this instance of benevolence in God, it had been impossible for his sinful creatures to have escaped the punishment they had incurred; but the demands of his justice, which sees every action in its true light, have been fully satisfied; he hath accepted the sufferings of a Mediator, whom he hath dignified by an union with himself as a satisfaction which it was not in the power of man to make.

I shall not, in this place, examine the great variety of objections which have been offered by those who refuse to acknowledge the necessity of a Mediator, and who pretend that we cannot be justified by the righteousness of another. I see in part the reasons which induced the Supreme Being to accept of a vicarious sacrifice, and also the great advantages which result from this plan of reconciliation. But though we should not clearly discern those things, yet we ought not to be too hasty in judging of the designs of God by our ideas, or by our manner of thinking.

It appears then that we are too apt to confound things which are very different from each other. A sinner cannot be acceptable to

God ; neither can he procure his approbation, on account of the death of a Mediator, as long as he continues in sin. The immediate effect of this death consists in rendering a man, though sinful, capable of receiving the Divine favor, when, by using the means which are furnished by grace, he renounces the slavery of sin to serve and obey God ; the infirmities, which are inseparable from human nature, will no longer be imputed to him. By this plan of redemption, man is reformed ; a renovation of life succeeds ; and he is placed in such a state that the Divine compasssion may receive him into grace and favor.

LETTER XIV.

Recapitulation, with some further illustrations, of the foregoing remarks and reasoning. Peroration; and exhortation of the author to his daughter.

LET us, then, my daughter, embrace with gratitude this general pardon; let us offer our tribute of praise to him who, out of his infinite love, found out a ransom for us; let us with confidence, walk in that way in which Christ hath gone before us; let us endure with cheerfulness the transient sufferings of this life, nor view with horror the approaches of another. The consolation which must support us in life and death is now found; by the help of this, we can, without fear, and in perfect tranquillity of mind, contemplate the progressive advances of our dissolution, and boldly enter into eternity.

We perceive our depravity, and, if we would speak ingenuously, we must confess that we are slaves to our wills, and that it is with reluctance we submit our conduct to the divine precepts of the Christian religion. The inclinations of the flesh are strong and vigorous; they attach us to the present life—they acquire a domination over all our faculties, and banish from the will every thought of futurity. The love

of our Saviour, who redeemed us, is cold and languid ; and we have but a servile fear of God, who, in our imagination, is too holy. These sentiments are deeply rooted in the dark recesses of our hearts : every thing conspires to remind us of our weakness, and to convince us that humility is a disposition which becomes, in the highest degree, creatures so corrupt and imperfect.

These are disagreeable truths ; and the confession of which we are obliged to make of them must be very mortifying to human pride ; but it is useful and salutary to present them to the mind. When we reflect, on the one hand, upon our incapacity of delivering ourselves from this corruption ; and when we consider, on the other, the greatness and purity of our Judge who must be displeased at our depraved condition, and whose displeasure is the worst of evils ; when, I say, we reflect on these things, they must sink us into despair. But God hath manifested his charitable designs towards us ; he hath given us the greatest and the noblest hopes. We have it in our power to be for ever happy ; and though this corruption will always adhere to us, and is never radically removed, yet it will be no obstacle to our felicity. The Divine Goodness hath accepted a satisfaction for these

imperfections, which are inherent in our nature.

I shall not here take notice of those abstruse questions which have been started about the liberty of man : it is an impenetrable mystery. The philosophers of our days think they have good reasons for banishing all liberty from the world. " We are governed by necessity," they say ; " all the resolutions which we form, or all the actions of our will, have their cause in something which happened the preceding moment."—But the internal conviction of my own mind rejects these subtleties ; I perceive in myself a self-determining power ; I observe, that if we in a great measure depend upon our senses, and upon the passions which they excite, it is not, however, impossible for us to resist them. I speak from experience ; none of the passions are unconquerable ; the idea of an immense God, who is always present with us, and the recourse we may have to him by prayer, are sufficient means to bring them into subjection. We have the power of removing from our minds the thoughts of eternity, if disagreeable to us ; we have also the power of reflecting upon its importance : the capacity which we have of becoming virtuous consists in our choice of giving or

refusing our attention, to whatever agrees or disagrees with our favorite pursuits.

Let us employ the time present ; eternity will be our reward if we make a good use of it. Let us always have before our eyes the nature and consequence of sin ; let us remember that it will deprive us of the favor of God, and expose us to his indignation. Let us reflect on the value of eternity, and on that life and that immortality which Christ hath brought to light by the gospel. The smallest satisfactions of this present short life, which are but puerile amusements, must disappear, when placed in competition with the greatness and durability of the glory which is hereafter.

Let us never forget that we were born for eternity, and that an affair of so great importance should be the principal occupation of our lives.

Let us follow the light that will conduct us thither—the precepts of our Savior plainly point out the way. How insensible then must we be to suffer ourselves to be directed by any other ?

We acknowledge the corruption of our nature ; we confess that it terminates in death : we are persuaded that Jesus hath the words of eternal life. Let us then study them with attention, apply them with

sincerity to ourselves ; continually inculcate them on our minds, and seek the assistance of that light, which was brought from heaven to earth.

We are ignorant of a great number of things. We know not, in particular, the operations of the grace of God, nor how it enlightens the mind. No person can sincerely devote himself to the Supreme Being without perceiving the emotions of his grace.—“If a man keep my commandments,” says our Saviour, “he will perceive that I am come from God.”—It is the influence of his grace which excites in us good desires ; which represents to us our own unworthiness, and which animates our souls with an ardent desire of procuring the favor of God. These are sentiments which every wise and rational man is capable of experiencing.

I am well persuaded that we have in this grace a powerful succour to liberate us from sin, and make us aspire after that condition which is more worthy of man.

I must confess that the manner of the co-operation of grace is an inexplicable mystery ; it is, however, a revealed truth.—The mode of its acting is too obscure for us to comprehend. We know not the laws of the actions of spirits. We know not the

manner by which one body moves another. How then shall we discern the method by which one spirit acts upon another spirit? Perhaps, if we too clearly perceived the operation of grace upon our minds, it might be an obstacle to the exercise of our liberty. —The advice of our Saviour is a sufficient direction to us in this matter.—“Search the scriptures—believe in me—keep my ‘commandments, for they are easy.’—God will do the rest. These commandments will be easy to us, when once we are convinced of the importance of eternity; for what can the present life offer which can be compared with what we may either hope for, or fear, during this eternity?

We are restored from the lowest state of abasement and dejection. We are animated with the most comfortable promises.—We now walk with confidence in that road which hath been marked out for us with so much wisdom; and which so well corresponds with our inclinations and abilities.—We leave behind us those vices which tended to estrange us from God and happiness; before us is a benevolent Being, who offers, to the victorious, incorruptible crowns, as the recompense of victory; which victory he also helps us to gain. We may now rest satisfied with respect to our future condi-

tion, without perplexing ourselves about the trials which we shall have to undergo, and which are yet at a distance. Let us only employ to advantage the present hour. The means of salvation, the sacred writings, the precepts of our Saviour, are in our hands, we insensibly draw near to the desired harbour ; the approaches of dissolution become less formidable the nearer we arrive to the happy mansions of eternity, where error and vice will be disarmed, and have no more power over us.

Those persons who have been so happily situated as to be able to devote a great part of their time to the study of these most important of all truths, and to make it the principal employment of their lives, will be better qualified to exhibit them to your view in a more affecting manner, and so as to make a greater impression upon your mind. Receive them, however, my daughter, from the mouth of a father, who considers himself on the verge of life ; they are the most precious marks of tenderness which he can give you. These instructions would have been more perfect, if his capacity had been more extensive. They are, however, the result of his reflections, and of the researches which he has made after truth ; they are also the effect of his internal conviction.—

Your father who now addresses you, hath had his doubts ; he hath sometimes been mistaken ; and hath wished, in those moments, that the consequences of sin were not so grievous. He hath not been exempt from falling ; but the victorious grace of God hath kindly come to his relief. He can now behold, without fear, his approaching death. Beyond this period he sees objects of joy, and subjects of hope ; all which invite him to press forward to that eternity, where death will be vanished, and where sin will have no access. *Your* heart, which is so little corrupted with vicious sentiments, will find less difficulty in the way that leads to life. After having finished your race, you will meet your father in those glorious and peaceful habitations, where the thoughts of our corruption will no more be productive of inquietude and shame, nor the sufferings of the present time fill any longer our eyes with tears.

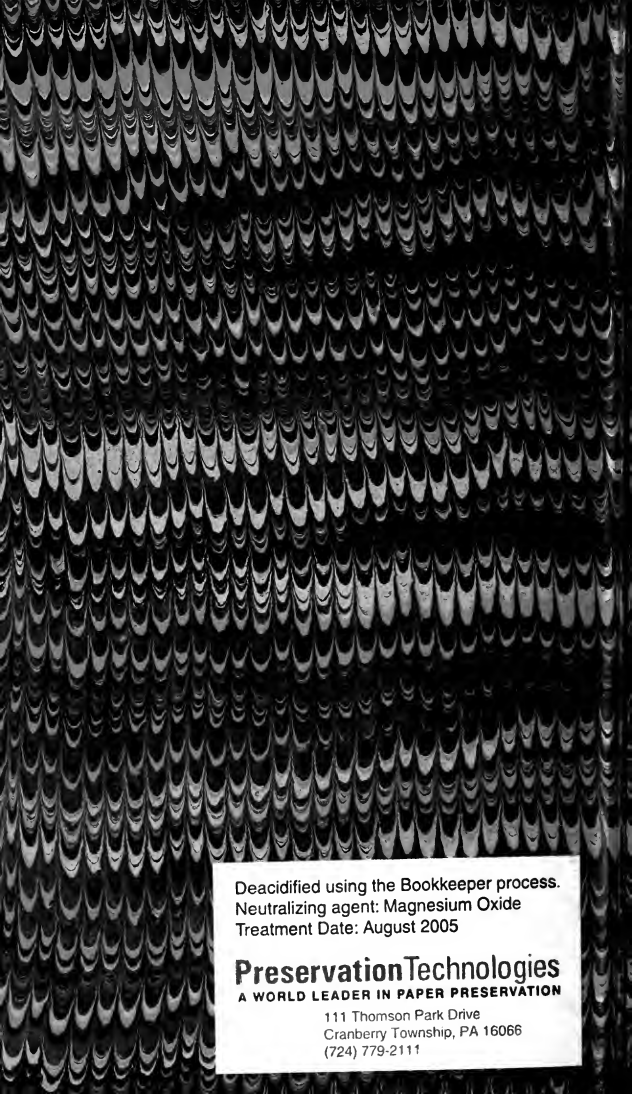
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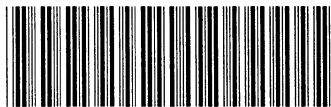
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